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CALIFORNIA

A XXX BUNCH. (*Page* 290.)

CATTLE RANCH TO COLLEGE

The True Tale of a Boy's Adventures in the Far West

by

RUSSELL DOUBLEDAY

Illustrated

GROSSET & DUNLAP, *Publishers*
NEW YORK
by arrangement with Doubleday Doran & Co.

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THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

TO MY MOTHER,

KINDLY CRITIC, COUNSELLOR, AND FRIEND;

THIS BOOK IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

M57304

FOREWORD

Tempting boys to be what they should be—giving them in wholesome form what they want—that is the purpose and power of Scouting. To help parents and leaders of youth secure *books boys like best* that are also best for boys, the Boy Scouts of America organized EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY. The books included, formerly sold at prices ranging from $1.50 to $2.00 but, by special arangement with the several publishers interested, are now sold in the EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY Edition at $1.00 per volume.

The books of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY were selected by the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America, consisting of George F. Bowerman, Librarian, Public Library of the District of Columbia; Harrison W. Craver, Director, Engineering Societies Library, New York City; Claude G. Leland, Superintendent, Bureau of Libraries, Board of Education, New York City; Edward F. Stevens, Librarian, Pratt Institute Free Library, Brooklyn, N. Y., and Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Li-

brarian. Only such books were chosen by the Commission as proved to be, by *a nation wide canvas,* most in demand by the boys themselves. Their popularity is further attested by the fact that in the EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY Edition, more than a million and a quarter copies of these books have already been sold.

We know so well, are reminded so often of the worth of the good book and great, that too often we fail to observe or understand the influence for good of a boy's recreational reading. Such books may influence him for good or ill as profoundly as his play activities, of which they are a vital part. The needful thing is to find stories in which the heroes have the characteristics boys so much admire—unquenchable courage, immense resourcefulness, absolute fidelity, conspicuous greatness. We believe the books of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY measurably well meet this challenge.

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA,

James E. West

Chief Scout Executive.

PREFACE.

This is a true tale of a boy's life in the West twenty-five years ago. It is an account of his amusements, his trials, his work, his play. The incidents described actually happened and are described substantially as "the boy" related them to the writer.

The "wild and woolly" West is fast vanishing, and a great deal of the adventurous life is going with it. Buffalo hunts are things of the past; encounters with Indians that were experienced in the time of John Worth's boyhood are now happily very rare; railroads have penetrated the cattle country, and vast herds of cattle are no longer driven long distances to the shipping point, so that the consequent danger, hardship, and excitement are largely done away with.

In places the great prairies have been fenced, in others grain grows where heretofore only buffalo, cattle, and horses ranged, and much of the free, wild life of the cowboy, the ranchman, and the miner is gone for all time.

It is hoped that this book will be of interest, not because of its novelty but its truthfulness. The author feels that the story of a boy who has passed through the stern training of a frontier life to an honorable place in an Eastern university will be acceptable to boys young and old.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	An Indian Attack	1
II.	The Young Brave's Daring	20
III.	A Narrow Escape	36
IV.	Hitting the Trail	54
V.	In a Mining Camp	73
VI.	A Snowshoe Race	91
VII.	A Buffalo Hunt	106
VIII.	A Close Finish	123
IX.	A "Bad Man's" End	140
X.	Battle Royal	157
XI.	A Trying Journey	177
XII.	A Change of Scene	195
XIII.	Herding Horses and Panning Gold	214
XIV.	A Migration	229
XV.	"Range-Riding"	245
XVI.	A Broncho Buster	261
XVII.	A Cow-Puncher in Earnest	278

CHAPTER PAGE

XVIII. A Midnight Stampede 289

XIX. An Awakening 304

XX. A Transformation 317

XXI. Twelve Hundred Miles Awheel to College 331

MARGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

JANET MAC DONALD

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CATTLE RANCH TO COLLEGE

CATTLE RANCH TO COLLEGE.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER I.

AN INDIAN ATTACK.

A solitary horseman rode into the little frontier town of Bismarck, shortly after dark one evening, about twenty-five years ago. Horse and rider passed up the single unpaved street; in the darkness no one noticed the fagged condition of the animal, nor the excitement of the rider, betokened by the continued urging of his weary pony.

The town was unusually full of the nomadic people who made up its population, cowpunchers, saloon keepers, gamblers, freighters, and outlaws. The evening quiet was constantly broken by the sounds of revelry, and the report of a pistol occasionally punctuated the general

noise as some hilarious cowboy playfully shot at the lights.

In the dim ray cast across the street through the small windows of the saloons and dance halls, no one saw the horseman ride up the street to "Black Jack's," one of the most conspicuous saloons; here he stiffly dismounted and tied his pony to the pole where stood a row of other horses. After glancing around to see that all was secure, he entered. He was hailed with a chorus of shouted greetings and questions.

"Hello, Harry! what's the matter?"

"Why, there's Harry Hodson! What drove you down the trail to-night?"

"Are you dry, old man? Come and drive a nail with me."

These and many more questions poured in on him so thick and fast that no chance, for some time, was given him to speak.

As the crowd drew around the newcomer, who was a sober, steady cattleman from twenty-five miles up the river, they noticed that there was something out of the ordinary in his manner. Even the fact of his appearance at that place and hour was unusual.

"No, boys," he said, in answer to the many invitations to drink. "I think we'll all need clear heads before daylight."

"Why, what's the trouble?" chorused the crowd.

"The fact is," continued Hodson, hurriedly, "I *cached* my cattle and then came down to tell you that a big bunch of Indians crossed the river above my place this afternoon, and they looked as if they were on the war path."

All were attentive now, and even the most reckless of these wild men, living continually in the midst of dangers, wore grave faces.

"I didn't stop to investigate. I wasn't taking any chances, you see," he went on. "So I ran my cattle over onto Woody Island and then started down the trail, giving the word to the fellows along the road. Hostiles have been pretty thick across the river lately, and I've had to watch out."

By this time all hands were thoroughly interested. As Hodson went on with his tale, the men drew nearer to him, their faces showing how keenly they realized what his news might mean to all.

Questions followed thick and fast.

"How many were there? Where did they cross?" asked one.

"How many horses? Did they have any squaws with them?"

Without giving Hodson a chance to answer,

they all began to talk in an excited babel of voices, advancing opinions and theories as to what had taken place. One big fellow, in a red flannel shirt, asserted that they must have crossed the river at Elbow Island; another contradicted this statement and said that the stream was too wide at this point and that they crossed in "bull boats," as the rude craft made of buffalo or cow hides stretched over strong light frames of willow were called.

Hodson stood apart while this discussion was going on, with the bored air of one who was fully acquainted with the facts and could end the unnecessary talk in a moment if he was allowed an opportunity.

"Big Bill" Smith, one of the older men, took in the situation. "Dry up," said he; "let Harry talk, will you? He's the only one who knows anything."

"Well," said Harry, as the crowd once more turned to him, "there isn't much talking to do, but there's plenty of hustling ahead for us. About two hundred Indians crossed the river up at Sioux Ford. They were travelling pretty light, and I guess they are looking for beef or anything else they can lay their hands on; probably they think they can scare us off with a few shots and then run the stock off. They had a lot

of horses—not enough to go around—but a lot. We've got to get ready for them on the jump, for if they're coming they'll be here before daylight, and the stock and wagons will have to be got in right away."

"Somebody go for Jim Mackenzie," said Big Bill.

As one of the men started for the door to carry out this order, a tall, commanding figure, grizzled and somewhat bent, but more from hardship than from age, entered the room. He was recognized at once as the sheriff: the central figure when trouble was brewing, but a retiring, inconspicuous citizen when all was peaceful.

When action was required he was in his element. A man to depend on in time of trouble, one to command in an emergency. It was very noticeable that these rough cattlemen, accustomed to depend upon themselves, who when off duty acknowledged no law except their own wishes, instinctively looked for a leader when confronted with this common danger. No one thought for an instant of questioning his orders, but obeyed with military precision. For the time, his word was law.

"Harry," said the sheriff, turning to the bringer of these bad tidings, after the above facts

had been told him, "you put your saddle on my bay and take a couple of men with you back on the trail. Bring back Jim White and his outfit of wagons and stock; he's camped down on Hay Creek. There are some smaller outfits on the Black Hills road; better help them get in. You'll want to hustle," he added, as Hodson and his two helpers went out.

"Smith," continued the sheriff, issuing orders as fast as a pony could trot, "take a couple of men and get in the circle bar Q stock, there's only a night-herder with them. The rest of you who have wagons and stock out, bring them in yourselves. All you loose men," he added, as he noticed that several men still lingered in the hot, close, smoke-filled room, "get your guns, saddle up, and come to my shack."

The sheriff had been in the place but five minutes, but now fat Sam Whitney, a frequenter of the place, Black Jack, the saloon keeper, and a couple of soldiers from the fort across the river, were all that remained with him.

The men outside could be heard saddling up, struggling with their refractory horses, and calling out to each other; from time to time the rapidly diminishing sound of galloping hoofs came to the ears of the silent men who for the moment remained motionless.

The sheriff was planning his defence against the expected Indian attack, and the men who were with him, without a word, waited for the announcement of his next move. It was Jim Mackenzie, and they put themselves in his hands with blind confidence.

Bismarck was a frontier town in the full sense of the word. A collection of rude houses, more or less strongly built of logs and dried mud, straggled along the single street. Placed at the intersection of the expected railroad and the Missouri River, a town of considerable size was mapped and many streets with high-sounding names were projected. But only Main Street was actually laid out. The houses, which their inhabitants called shacks, were built on the north side of the street facing the south, in obedience to the natural law of cold climates, so Bismarck boasted really of but half a street, and that a short one.

Fort Abraham Lincoln, situated directly across the river, was supposed to afford protection to the settlers from the Indian marauders, but the hardy, self-reliant frontiersmen were generally able to take care of themselves. Not many of the inhabitants stayed the year round. The few who did remain through all seasons—the saloon keepers, horseshoers, stable keepers, and the

three families—dwelt in the more pretentious houses. The other residences were mere temporary shelters, which their owners would not have considered worth fitting up had they been able to do so.

Around the outskirts of the town were always a number of freight outfits, and this night was no exception to the general rule. The cumbrous wagons were drawn in a circle, harnesses lying in a seemingly hopeless tangle on the wagon tongues, and the tents were pitched against their sides or canvas lean-to's were rigged up. A number of greasy men lounged around the campfires, some sleeping, some re-braiding whips, some mending harness or chopping out new brake blocks. The work stock were grazing at a little distance where the grass was good, guarded by an armed herder.

To these freighters' camps came the sheriff himself to warn them of the impending danger. Immediately all was activity. The work stock were brought, and, in a trice, harnessed to the heavy wagons. The mules were urged forward with shouts and cracking of whips, and soon the whole outfit was on its way to form a cordon around the town, or, at least, on the side that was most likely to be attacked.

Mackenzie rode with the wagon-train for a

short distance, then branched off after giving some final orders, or rather suggestions, for any emergency that might arise.

"So long," he said.

"So long," said the driver of the leading team. (Whether a man was leaving for a trip across the street or across the continent, the parting words were, invariably, "So long.")

Mackenzie went on his way, skirting the town, keeping his eyes and ears wide open. There was nothing within hearing to indicate that the settlement was in danger of attack from the dreaded Indian. The teamsters could still be heard shouting to their mules, and an occasional creaking squeak from the wagons broke the stillness. The sheriff listened in vain for more ominous sounds.

"The reds are still pretty far off, or they are keeping mighty dark," he said to himself, as he put spurs to his horse and galloped towards one of the better-looking houses that stood on a little rise some distance from the Main Street settlement. Messengers had been sent in every

direction, to warn sleeping citizens, and all had been arranged for except this household, one of the three families of the town.

Mackenzie rode up to the door and, without dismounting, knocked.

In an instant there was a sound of bustling, for the Westerner sleeps with one eye open, and is ready at a moment's notice for anything that may occur.

"Who's there?" shouted a voice.

"Mackenzie," answered the sheriff.

Almost at the same moment the door opened, and a man stepped out.

"Hello, Worth!" said the sheriff. "You'd better bring the wife and children further down. Harry Hodson just came down the trail and reports a big bunch of Indians a few miles up, and——"

But Worth did not wait to hear any more.

"John," Worth shouted back into his shack; "you and Ben help your mother pack up the bedding and take care of the baby. We've got to be lively. You know what to do. You see, Mac," he said, turning to the horseman, "I thought I might as well get things started while you were telling me about these hostiles."

"All right," said the sheriff. "Good scheme. You might as well saddle up and come along

with me so you can find a place beforehand for the wife and kids."

In a few minutes both men were on their way to the centre of the town: Mackenzie, to send out his pickets and guards, and to arrange the placing of stock and wagons; Worth, to find a temporary shelter for his family. The boys, John and Ben, were left behind to look after the home, pack up the goods, catch and saddle the horses. It was a seemingly big task for boys of ten and twelve, but from the time these boys were able to walk they—in common with other boys of the frontier—had to look out largely for themselves. They were strong, sturdy little chaps. John, the elder, was his father's right-hand man, and when Mr. Worth was away on one of his frequent freighting trips, John was often called upon to take care of the family in emergencies much like the present one.

In this frontier town, the reports of bands of hostile Indians coming to raid and kill were not uncommon. The single man, active, mounted, armed with weapons as familiar to him as his right hand, had no fear of not being able to outwit or escape the enemy, wily as the redskins were. In fact, the Indians themselves were well aware of the ability of the plainsmen to cope with them when unhampered by women and

children, so they practically never began hostilities until they could get their white enemies at a disadvantage. The few families were, therefore, their especial point of attack. It was their helplessness that tempted the onslaught and aroused the savage instincts of these marauders. When the head of the family, the bread winner, was away, the dread of these fearful, relentless attacks on his helpless ones abode with him always. The mother and children, left at home, lived always under the shadow of the same fear.

John and his brother, therefore, fully understood the danger and the need for speedy and careful preparation. They had often, at the warning of the hostiles' approach, helped their mother make a fort of the solid log house by piling up the scanty furniture and bedding against the doors and windows, leaving only loopholes for their rifles; and though the present situation was one that would make ordinary boys useless through fear, John and Ben, on the contrary, were too busy to worry; they knew exactly what was to be done, and in their sturdy, independent way went to work to do it.

"Say, Ben," said John, as they went toward the corral (the circular inclosure in which the saddle horses were kept), "I'll bet it's just those Indians we saw across the river, day before yes-

terday, while we were hunting Gannons' horses. There was a lot of squaws in that bunch, do you remember?"

"That's right," assented Ben; "and I'll bet that some of Gannons' horses were in that lot of Indian ponies. If it was ten dollars reward instead of five, it might have been worth while to run the risk of trying to find out; but five dollars is too little to go fooling around a strange Indian's camp for."

The talk was ended by their arrival at the corral and the subsequent busy time catching and bridling of the horses. The ponies were then led to the door, where they were saddled. As they were cinching them up—as the tightening of the girths is called—Mr. Worth returned. In a few minutes the whole family were on their way to the Sebells', one of the other Bismarck families who lived on Main Street.

In town they found all activity. Horsemen were galloping to and fro, cattle, horses, and mules dashed in and out, wagons driven at full speed crossed and recrossed the dusty street. As soon as they were installed at their new-found shelter and their household goods disposed of, John went with his father to get in the extra stock of horses and mules, for, next to his family, these are the freighter's chief care.

They found their stock together, as was expected, for animals, particularly horses, that come from the same place, always stay together. This instinct made it much easier for the herder to gather his own, when there were many animals belonging to different outfits on a common grazing ground. The Worth stock was promptly driven inside the now almost complete circle of wagons, and there tied.

A group of men were busy piling up boxes, barrels, and bales, taken from the freighters' wagons, into the semblance of breastworks. As John and his father approached, the sheriff came forward and joined them.

"Family all right, Worth?" he asked, kindly. "I sent up a couple of men to help you and they reported that your shack was deserted and the place locked up for keeps. You didn't waste any time."

"That was good of you, Mac," said Mr. Worth, holding out his hand. "How you're able to think of so many things at once, beats me. Yes, we got out in pretty quick shape; you see my boys, Johnny here and Ben, are first-rate hands to depend on in an emergency. They did pretty near the whole thing to-night. By the way, the boys were hunting horses up the river day before yesterday, and saw quite a large

bunch of Indians in the brush below Harry Hodson's."

"Why didn't you say something about this before?" interrupted the sheriff, turning to John.

"Ben and I have seen plenty of Indians," said John, eagerly. "There were a lot of squaws in this bunch, so I didn't believe they were a war party. We didn't think anything more about them until this scare came up to-night."

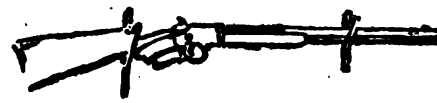
"Well, you have got a good head on you, young man. I don't know but you are right, and this may be a false alarm. Still Hodson generally knows what he's talking about." The sheriff was speaking more to himself than to his hearers. "I'm glad we've got a lot of first-rate scrappers with us; I guess the reds would think twice if they knew what they were running up against."

All was now comparatively quiet. The work and strain of preparation was succeeded by a time of waiting, a period of suspense that was, perhaps, harder to bear than the first shock of the unpleasant news.

John and his father returned to their temporary home to calm the mother's fears. Mrs. Worth had the family rifle ready, and Ben had polished and oiled every cartridge in the belt,

so that they would slip in without jamming. Mr. Worth shouldered the gun and went out, leaving the boys with their mother. Though all was now quiet and his mother and brother were asleep, John could not close his eyes. He understood, as his younger brother could not, the danger that menaced the household and the town. Death, swift, by knife or bullet, or slow through torture, was sure to come if that band of Indians got inside the inclosure. He had heard gruesome tales describing the treatment that the savages meted out to their prisoners and the horror of it would not leave him. At last he could stand it no longer. Quickly he rose from the heap of bedding and stole to the door. He was fully dressed, and his little six-shooter still slung on his left hip where he had buckled it when the sheriff first knocked at the home shack.

All was still outside, except for the occasional stamping of a pony or the distant wail of a coyote. Pickets were posted just over the rise to the north of the town, from which direction the attack was expected. They were to give warning of the approach of the Indians by a rifle shot.



Suddenly there was borne on the breeze to the waiting men the sound of galloping horses. Louder it grew, then fainter; then again still louder. So the sound wavered, but ever came nearer.

The watchers sprang to their feet, rifles ready, eyes gleaming.

"Steady, boys," said the calm voice of Mackenzie. "Wait a bit."

Still the thumping of many hoofs approached nearer.

What had become of the pickets? Had they been all killed with the enemy's noiseless arrows? Or had they been lured away beyond hearing and shot?

Daylight was breaking; the enemy could now be seen, that was one comfort. And as they stood, ears alert, eyes strained, their nerves keyed up to the tensest pitch, awaiting the onslaught, that ominous noise of hoof-beats came ever nearer, nearer, nearer.

Suddenly a horse's head appeared above the brow of the hill, then another and another until quite a score or more were in plain view. They dashed down the incline toward the corral of wagons. But they were all riderless! Presently two riders appeared. They shouted a greeting as they came down the hill and explained that

they were of the N bar N outfit (that is to say, their brand bore these marks: $\frac{N}{N}$).

A space was hastily cleared between the wagons to allow these newcomers' horses to enter the inclosure; but it was too late; the bunch parted, turning to right and left. The two herders also separated in pursuit, each following a bunch.

Immediate danger over, the waiting men relaxed their extra vigilance, and all hands watched the efforts of the two herders in their vain attempts to head off their charges. The sheriff was just saying, "I wish some of you fellows would help round up that bunch; we want to get them all in before the hostiles show up," when a third horseman appeared, riding like the wind.

"Say, that chap has got a fresh horse," said "Casino," one of the freighters.

The new arrival, after a headlong dash, regardless of ditches, brush, and badger holes, succeeded in rounding up the frightened horses, and with the help of the herder, drove them into camp. A similar performance soon brought in the other bunch.

As the new rider trotted in through the gap, some one shouted: "What'll you take for that horse? He's a regular whirlwind."

"Yes," said one of the herders, "he's a dandy,

isn't he? My stock would have got away if Johnny Worth hadn't come out on Baldy."

"So it's Johnny Worth, eh!" said Bill Smith. "Good work, kid."

"Oh!" said Johnny, "they're only worn-out, winded plugs; they were easy for Baldy. He was saddled and all ready," the boy added in explanation.

"Well done, Johnny," said the sheriff, who had once before that night praised the boy's pluck. Then, turning to the group about him, "Some of you boys had better get breakfast," said he; "there's no telling when that war party may turn up, and you must eat now when you have the chance."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG BRAVE'S DARING.

While the men were eating (a sufficient number being left to keep watch and guard) in one of the dance halls, which was hastily impressed for the purpose, the herders of the N bar N outfit were questioned as to their knowledge of the Indians.

They reported that the redskins were in force and were coming rapidly in the direction of the town. That while they were guarding their stock, they were startled by the sudden appearance of an Indian near them, who yelled and waved his blanket, and finally succeeded in stampeding the animals. They started off at a gallop after the horses, and this solitary brave forthwith disappeared.

The stock stampeded but the herders stayed with them, riding full speed over all sorts of rough country. The Indians appeared at intervals in pursuit of them, and added to the confusion and danger by keeping up a running fire.

The herders said they were about to give up the attempt to keep their charges out of the savages' hands when they came in sight of the town. "Even then," said one of the men, called Singing Jim, "we couldn't have corralled the beasts if that youngster hadn't chased out to help us on a fresh horse, and a fast one at that."

"We'll have troubles yet," said the other herder, Calamity Jake he was called, because of his ability to see small black clouds of evil a great distance off. "Plenty of trouble, too, in the shape of Indians on the warpath. They were not far behind us when we reached these diggin's."

"What became of your wagons?" said Harry Hodson, a mouthful of beans interfering somewhat with his speech.

"Oh, I guess they're done for. Probably makin' light for the Indians to do a war dance by," remarked Singing Jim, cheerfully.

"I reckon not," said Mackenzie, who had appeared in time to hear the last; "they'll not show their location by making a big blaze like——"

"I heard a shot fired from over the hill," shouted Johnny, who stuck his head in at the door that moment. "Maybe it's one of the pickets."

The men jumped up and made a rush for the

door. The herder, Singing Jim, who was the last man out, exclaimed as he disappeared, "Well, if that kid ain't ubikkertous, as the States' papers say!"

Several shots were now heard and then the pickets topped the rise and made a break down the slope to the town.

The enemy was close, but still invisible behind the ridge.

The men lay crouched behind their barricade, silent, alert, ready for what might come. The three pickets made their way back to the breastworks and reported that the advance guard had shown itself coming down a *coulie* half a mile away, and the main body, probably fifty strong, was straggling after when the pickets last looked back. A long night of vigil and hurried preparation had told on these watchers and they were anxious to begin the work and end the suspense. The short ten minutes which elapsed seemed ten hours. Then two Indians rode to the top of the ridge and looked down upon the preparations for their reception. They were a long rifle shot distant and the defenders had no ammunition to spare. Moreover, if unprovoked, the redskins might go without firing a shot. To tell the truth, however, especially when they saw the unlikelihood of making a successful assault, most

of the little garrison were in the mood to feel disappointed if the attack ended so harmlessly.

"If those fellows are hard up for a fight," said Big Bill Smith, "maybe they'll tackle us; but I never saw an Indian yet that would ride a quarter of a mile in the open under fire even when he wanted something to eat,"—and Bill knew Indians.

"They won't leave without tryin' us," said Casino. "You'll see if I ain't right."

A moment later two painted and befeathered savages appeared to the left, and rode full tilt along the hillside in direct view of the camp, yelling and waving their blankets in derision: a tantalizing sight to the waiting men.

"Keep steady, there," called Mackenzie, sternly, as several rifles were raised. "There's no use shooting now; they're only trying to draw our fire and find out how strong we are. There'll be more presently. Wait for them."

A few minutes later half a dozen braves repeated the ruse. The flying figures, almost naked, being poor targets, the fire of the little garrison was still reserved. A dozen then made the run, one following the other, at regular intervals. More and more of the painted, yelling, gesticulating savages followed, dashing along the slope in single file and disappearing

over the ridge to the right, until what was a short line became a procession.

Presently they began to creep down the hill, each rider advancing beyond the one preceding him, all yelling epithets of contempt as they came ever nearer the silent garrison.

This was the regular mode of Indian attack; it afforded them an opportunity to fire and yet gave their enemy a very poor chance to do any damage.

A desultory firing began; each Indian letting go his reins, fired his rifle as best he could as he rushed past. The shooting was naturally bad, for there was no chance to take careful aim. If the savages planned, however, to draw the fire of the besieged and so determine their strength, the scheme failed, for not a shot was fired from the camp, though the provocation was great.

The rushing line came closer and closer. The colors of the war paint and fluttering feathers could now be plainly seen. It was within easy range, but still the fire was withheld. Each Indian had worked himself into the frenzy which is so necessary a part of a brave's courage.

As the distance was lessened, the savages' aim became better, and several bullets struck the wagons and the barricade. The situation began to be interesting; any shot might now reach its

human target, and the temptation to return the fire was almost irresistible.

But the sheriff only said, "Not yet."

The bullets were striking freely and the yelling enemy were within easy revolver range.

At last Mackenzie, who showed signs of suppressed eagerness, said, just loud enough to be heard: "Boys, don't shoot when your man is opposite; wait till he has passed, then aim at his back and shoot straight. You can't hit him otherwise. Ready now. Fire!"

This was not a military company, but a band of frontiersmen, which a common danger united under the leadership of one man. The volley which followed, therefore, was not one of precision, for every man took his time and pulled the trigger when he was ready.

The Indians, anticipating a return fire, rode by at full speed, their bodies hugging their horses closely. They made difficult targets, so the first few shots did nothing more than kill and disable a horse or two; but soon the fire became more rapid and accurate. A big buck was seen to fall out of his saddle, another was thrown violently from a wounded horse, several were hit in arms and legs. The yelling diminished and the line moved further up the slope, scattering as it went.

As the file, now rather scattered, turned the

ridge at the right, firing as it moved, a young buck, in full war regalia and mounted on a beautiful bay pony, bounded into view. He dashed out of the circle of Indians, and rode boldly down toward the white men, yelling defiance.

He was a young chief endeavoring to earn the approval of his tribe and the consequent advancement and influence, according to the custom of the Sioux. Down the hill he came with a rush right into the thick of the fire, and yet, though the bullets whistled on all sides of him, he was unharmed. Nearer and nearer he drew, until he reached a point within two hundred yards of the white man's guns. Then he stopped, turned his pony half-way round and flourished his revolver derisively, yelling imprecations at the garrison the while. He then fired a shot which came so close to John, that he was sure he could feel the wind of it—the sound was unmistakable.

After this reckless feat, the young chief trotted slowly back to his own people, but kept his face always towards his enemies. The daring of the deed took both sides by surprise, and for a time hardly a shot was fired by white man or red. It was a tribute to the young brave's courage and bravado.

It would not do, however, to let him escape unharmed. Other warriors might be inspired to

emulate the rash act, and if they took it into their heads to rush the stockade there would certainly be much loss of life.

The Indians now began firing again, covering as well as possible their comrade's retreat. Those behind the barricade also woke up.

"Shoot that fellow, boys," cried Big Bill. "He mustn't get away unhurt. We've got to discourage that sort of thing."

Every man aimed at the fleeing Indian, but still he rode with his face towards his foe, gesturing defiance. The feathers in his war-bonnet fluttered in the wind, and the quirt hung on his upraised right wrist swayed with the motion of his pony.

Of a sudden a single rifle spoke from the white man's intrenchments, and, in an instant, the young chief was changed from a superb living bronze statue to a lump. He fell, clawing at his saddle and yelling shrilly. His well-trained war pony slowed down and circled back to where his master lay.

All this occupied much less time than it takes to tell it.

During this distraction, half a dozen Indians, who had been unhorsed, rose from their brush coverts and ran for their lives to gain the more substantial refuge which the ridge afforded.

Four escaped, but two were dropped in their tracks before they could reach the shelter.

Though bullets had dropped all around the white men, none had been hit.

"Had enough?" said the sheriff. "Found the camp stronger than you thought, eh?"

Such seemed to be the case, for, after a long parley, which was held discreetly out of range, the band disappeared, leaving their dead on the prairie.

An attempt had been made to rescue the fallen, but the risk was too great, and it was given up.

The Indians had been gone some time before the little garrison crept carefully from under cover, for the Sioux were notoriously tricky and their apparent departure might simply be a ruse to put their enemies off their guard.

Finally, however, the sheriff turned to his men. "Casino," said he, "you, Singing Jim, and Calamity Jake follow their trail and see what becomes of them. If they start to come back you hump yourselves and let us know. You'd better go along, Hodson, and look after your stock."

The men appointed saddled up and started out without delay. The good wishes of those remaining went with them. It was a perilous

undertaking, for there was no telling where the war party might be or what they might do.

After the scouts had left, guards were set to keep watch and prevent a surprise, though it was thought that there was little danger of an attack by daylight.

The sheriff and the rest of the men began to count noses, not only of men but of stock, for it might be that in the excitement some one or some animal had been hit unknown to the others. In fact, it would be a marvel if one bullet had not reached its mark, since, at times, they had dropped around like hail.

All were found intact, but several of the wagons had been pretty badly riddled.

A barrel of molasses which rested in one of the wagons was punctured by a 45-calibre bullet, and the sticky stuff leaked down on and in a trunk marked "Charles R. Green, Boston."

"Belongs to a tenderfoot who got stalled with the rest of his outfit near the railroad," Casino had explained, when some one remarked on the strange object.

Certainly the "tenderfoot" was having rather a novel introduction to the hardships of frontier life. As Charley Green said afterwards, "he was stuck on himself for fair."

Mr. Worth and John now thought of the fam-

ily at the Sebells', and at the first lull they made their way back between wagons, around and through bunches of cattle, mules, and horses to the house. It was hard to tell which was most glad to see the other, but a stranger coming in would not have realized that this was the return of a father and son after several hours' exposure to all the perils of Indian warfare. There were no tears of joy, no outward demonstration of happiness. The frontiersman had learned, perhaps from the Indian, perhaps from stern nature herself, to keep his feelings to himself. Even John and Ben were not demonstrative.

"I suppose you did 'em up?" said the latter to his more fortunate brother. "How many were there in the party?"

John dropped to the floor, for the experience of the night before was, at least, trying. "Sure we did," he answered. "They didn't come till daylight and so were in plain sight, while we were under cover, see? Same bunch we saw the other day, I guess. Phew! I'm tired."

He had hardly got the words out of his mouth before he was sound asleep, and, not long after, his father was also in the land where none but phantom enemies are seen.

The Indians evidently had enough, for they disappeared, taking with them, however, some of

the N bar N stock. The two herders accepted the situation, each in his own fashion.

"I told you so," groaned Calamity Jake. "These peaky Indians ought to be wiped off the face of the earth."

Singing Jim, however, merely grinned, and said as he ran his fingers through his hair: "Well, I'm glad this thatch is not decorating some Sioux tepee. I think it looks better on me than it would on a lodge pole."

After this, things went on in much the same old way in the little frontier town, for the Indians did not venture another attack.

In spite of its small size, Bismarck was a busy place and was the distributing point for a large unsettled territory.

Freighters came in from points on the distant railroad with provisions for the cattlemen, trappers, and miners, and the constantly changing population of the town. Their wagons were in long trains, one hitched to the other, the whole drawn by many teams of mules and driven by one man, who rode the near mule next the first wagon, controlling his team by a single "jerk line," which ran to the front near animal. This mule, who was picked for his intelligence, knew that one pull on the line meant turn left, and two short jerks indicated that a right turn was

wanted; moreover, he knew just how wide a sweep to make to clear an obstruction.

When the trapper came to town to bring in his pelts for shipment East, and to get a supply of pork, beans, and coffee—his standbys in the matter of diet—and when the cowboy raced in with a couple of pack ponies to get supplies for his outfit, the rare opportunity was always taken advantage of to enjoy what pleasures the town afforded. The gamblers and saloon keepers did a thriving business, though a perilous one, for, on the slightest provocation, the frontiersman was ever ready with his shooting irons.

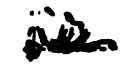
It was only a few weeks after the Indian attack described before the parching heat of summer began to give way before the dreaded wintry breath of the North.

John and Ben, when they went out to guard their father's stock, gave up their daily swimming in the river and took up horse racing instead; and many a race was hotly contested. The boy, however, who rode Baldy, the big bay, always won.

Mr. Worth, as has been noted before, was a freighter; he was also a miner, opening up mines of coal in the deep-cut river banks, the coal so obtained being sold to the government for the fort garrisons.

On these coal-prospecting trips he usually went alone, carrying on his back the bare necessaries of life: a blanket, perhaps a string of bacon, a bag of beans, and a little coffee, besides the never-absent rifle and revolver.

Late in the fall, Mr. Worth set out on a prospecting trip. The garrisons of Fort Lincoln and other outposts situated up the river were clamoring for more fuel, and no time must be lost if they were to be supplied before the heavy snows set in.



John went with his father a half day's journey, helping to carry his equipment. They started out afoot, and the mother, holding the baby in her arms, watched them.

"So long," called back Mr. Worth, as he started out.

"So long," returned his wife.

At dark, John returned and, in his self-sufficient way, began to prepare for the night. He and Ben each saddled a horse, of which there were several tied to a pole, and set out to round up the "saddle band" (as the ponies which were reserved for riding were called), and the work stock of mules and pack horses. They were not far off, nibbling the tufted buffalo grass, and soon were turned toward the corral, the boys riding on either side, ready to head off any

animal that showed a disposition to separate or lead the "bunch" astray.

The stock safely disposed of, John and Ben went back to the shack, but were promptly sent out again for wood and water.

"Let's get a lot of wood," said Ben, "for it's colder than blazes. Hope the governor will find a good place to turn in to-night."

"Oh, he's all right," replied John, between grunts, for the load of wood he was carrying was both heavy and bulky.

An hour or so later, the windows and door were barred, the embers of the fire scattered, and all hands turned in for the night. The beds were really bunks built into the wall, and were not exactly luxurious, spring mattresses being quite unknown; but the boys found them comfortable, and in a minute or two were rolled in their blankets like great cocoons and fast asleep.

. . . . . .

Mr. Worth was not expected back for several weeks, for his journey was to be a long one and subject to many delays on account of bad weather and, worse, Indians.

It was about a week after he had left that Charley Green came up to where the boys sat on the doorstep braiding whips or quirts.

"Hullo, kids," he said, "Mr. Mackenzie wants

—what are you doing?" His curiosity made him forget his errand.

"Braidin' a rope to hang a couple of horse thieves," said John, facetiously. "What did you think we were doing, branding calves?"

Even the kids made fun of the "tenderfoot," who was really a good fellow, just out from an Eastern college, but densely ignorant as far as Western ways went. He saw he was being laughed at, and so hastened to come back to his errand.

"Mr. Mackenzie wants some old clothes, blankets, and other warm things for a man who turned up just now, half-dressed. He's almost frozen. White man, too," he added.

In a few minutes John and Tenderfoot Green reached the sheriff's shack, bearing clothes and blankets. The crowd that stood before the door parted and allowed them to pass.

In the far corner of the room, leaning over the fire, sat a man who turned his head as John and Green came in.

"Why, it's my father!" cried John.

CHAPTER III.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The boy rushed forward and asked what had happened.

The small, rough living-room in the sheriff's shack was soon crowded with men who pressed forward eager to hear the story.

When Mr. Worth was rested somewhat and thoroughly warmed through, he began:

"After leaving home, I travelled for two days and nothing happened. There were plenty of Indian signs about, marks of moccasined feet and prints of unshod horses' hoofs."

"Where were you bound?" asked some one.

"Up the river near Fort Stevenson. Got a coal mine up there, you know," the narrator answered. "Well, I kept a pretty sharp lookout for hostiles—and all the Indians are hostile around Fort Stevenson—but up to the time I'm going to tell you about I didn't see any. I followed the old trails made by the buffalo and deer across the prairie, and did my best to cover up

my own tracks—wore moccasins till the cacti cut 'em too much, then shifted to boots. Of course boots made a much clearer print and would give me away sure if they were seen."

"Why?" whispered Tenderfoot Green to Casino.

"Because, you chump," retorted Casino, "the Indians never wear boots, so they know right away when they see marks of heel and sole that a white man has been that way. See?"

Worth continued, without noticing this whispered colloquy: "I was getting nearer and nearer the river every minute, and I knew that when I got there my chances of getting through all right would be better, for the brush and banks would afford the cover that the prairie lacked."

His hearers nodded their heads understandingly, and even Tenderfoot Green seemed to take in the situation.

"The wind was getting pretty keen, and I was afraid it would snow; if it did, I knew my trail would be as plain as a column of smoke in a clear sky, so I hustled for the river at a good pace. In spite of my hurry, though, I managed to keep a sharp lookout for Indians. As I topped every rise I took a good survey of everything in view, and it was well I did, for about dusk I reached the crest of a low hill, and on glancing over saw an Indian

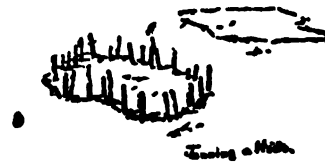
village. It lay directly in my path, not far from the river. It was still too light to attempt to go round it, so I lay down behind some sage brush and watched what was going on. The village, which contained about fifty tepees, was placed within easy distance of the river and was well supplied with cottonwood."

"Used the cottonwood for fuel, I suppose?" broke in Green.

"Yes, and the green bark to feed the horses on in heavy snowy weather," volunteered Mackenzie.

"Excuse me, Mr. Worth," apologized Tenderfoot, "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"That's all right," said Worth. "A lot of squaws were busy doing men's work, as is the way of the poor things, scraping hides that were staked on the ground, mending buffalo-skin tepees, pounding berries, carrying wood and water. Some were busy with easier jobs, such as making deerskin clothes and ornamenting moccasins with beads. I could see only a few bucks; the others were probably off on a hunt.



There was danger in that, for if they found my trail on their way back to camp they would of course follow it, and then—well, I should be lucky to come out of it alive."

The listening men began to show signs of impatience. All this was an old story to them; they wanted to hear the end of the tale, and how he came to be in such a plight.

"Well, to make a long story short," said Worth, beginning to realize that he was telling much that was obvious to most of his hearers, "while I lay there, planning and idly watching the Indian camp, the hunting party was actually returning. Suddenly I felt the weight of a man on my back. I struggled and fought, and finally threw him off. Jumping to my feet, I faced two savages who had come in advance of the main party and had stolen on me unawares. Both now rushed at me, but I dodged one and tripped the other. Before I could finish the man I had thrown, the first was at me again. Loaded as I was by my pack, I was soon fagged. My gun had been taken by the redskin when he fell on me. Why he didn't use it on me I cannot understand—perhaps I didn't give him time. Now both of them jumped for me, and try as I might I could not dodge or disable them. I had already begun to fear that the game was up, when

I saw a whole bunch of Indians, the rest of the hunting party, coming along the trail.

"There wasn't any use fighting a mob like that, so I stopped struggling, let my captors hold me, and waited for whatever might come.

"The redskins crowded around me, and I thought that my time had come.

"'Stev'son, you come in,' says one brave. 'Hoss, pony, you got 'em?' calls out another big scowling savage. I shook my head.

"Then I caught sight of a face I knew—old Chief Looking Glass. (I warmed him up with coffee once when he was near frozen to death. Indians will do most anything for a cup of coffee.) He pushed forward through the crowd and shook hands with me. I could see he was trying to get his men to separate and leave us, but it wasn't any sort of use; they pressed around, and it was very evident that they wanted my pack. Looking Glass finally started alone towards the camp, calling to his braves to come along, but this plan didn't work at all; for the minute he got out of sight over the brow of the hill the thieving gang began to strip me. There was no use resisting; they were too many for me. Before I knew where I was I was stark naked, except for a few rags. Even my boots were yanked off. We were almost in the village by

this time, for I had been pulled and pushed over the crest and down the slope of the hill. My tormentors then left me and began to divide my outfit, so I crawled off, shivering and sore, anxious to get out of sight as soon as possible."

"Wasn't it cold?" said Tenderfoot Green.

"Rather," said Mr. Worth, a grim smile showing on his weather-beaten face. "A man does not go tramping across the bare prairie in weather like this dressed in a few rags, barefooted, and feel as if he was in a hot spring. It was fully as cold as it is now, and this is a pretty sharp day." He shivered at the mere remembrance, while his listeners gave a general laugh at the simplicity of the question.

"Where did you get your blanket and moccasins?" asked Green, anxious to divert the crowd's attention.

He pointed at the articles that Worth seemed to be guarding with unnecessary care.

"These here blanket and moccasins saved my life," continued the latter. "As I was pushing along I heard a woman's voice calling. I turned and saw a squaw running after me with a blanket and a pair of moccasins in her hands. 'Looking Glass blanket and moccasins,' she said, as she handed them to me. Then she turned timidly and ran back to the camp.

"It was almost dark now, and growing colder every minute. I put on the moccasins, wrapped the blanket around me, though it smelled strong of Indian, and set out at a dog-trot in the direction of a wagon trail. If I could reach that I might be lucky enough to strike a white man's camp or a freighter's outfit, and then I should be all right.

"I travelled all that night, keeping in the right direction by a sort of instinct that my knowledge of the lay of the land gave me. It was a pretty tough journey though, I can tell you. I had to fight hard to keep off the sleepy feeling that comes before freezing, and for hour after hour I dragged myself along numb and aching with the cold, but hoping against all reason and probability that I might run across some of the boys before it was too late. Toward daybreak I must have got kinder lonely, for I lost track of things, and only came to myself in the freighters' camp that I had run into half asleep."

He paused here, and John saw that his eyes were half closed and his head nodding. The ordeal had told on even his sturdy health.

In a thick, sleepy voice he added: "Ask Jim White; he knows the rest—he brought me in."

Jim White could add little to the story. Worth came into his camp, he explained, more dead

than alive and "clean out of his head." He and his partner had cared for him and brought him to town as fast as the teams could go.

John's father was taken over to his own shack, where his wife greeted him like one come back from the dead. Under her good nursing he recovered from his terrible experience in a marvellously short time and became again his own sturdy self. The frontiersman must of necessity be possessed of an iron constitution, for he must be able to endure hardships of all kinds—intense heat and piercing cold, hunger and thirst, fatigue and pain, that would either kill an ordinary man outright or cripple him for life.

It was with inward dread that the little family watched its head start off again, after a few weeks' stay in town. Outwardly, however, cheerfulness, almost indifference, was manifested. This time he went with a party which was going in the same direction; the danger was, consequently, not so great. Then, too, the cold weather kept the Indians pretty close to their own camps, and as the locations of these were generally known, they could be easily avoided.

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The boys' hearts were gladdened by the news that, perhaps, the home shack would be abandoned in the spring, when their father returned.

If so, the whole family would "hit the trail" to the north and west.

Up to this time the Worth boys had been town dwellers, though in these days Bismarck could hardly be dignified even by the name of village. John and Ben, in common with the few other boys, had enjoyed the comparatively tame pleasures afforded by the town and the surrounding prairie. All large game had been driven west, and only prairie dogs, gophers, coyotes, and occasionally wolves remained; these and the birds the boys used to shoot at day after day with their ever-ready revolvers. The sport in the river was not all that could be wished for either, for the water was muddy and the bottom was full of quicksands. And if summer lacked diversions, winter was a still more uninteresting season, in that the pleasures were fewer and the discomforts greater.

It was therefore with great glee that John and Ben looked forward to this pilgrimage. A hilly country was to be visited, where game of all sorts abounded, where clear streams were plenty, and where new sports of all kinds were in prospect. Marvellous tales of trapping beaver, and hunting antelope, bear, and even buffalo, were brought in by hunters, so the boys were wild to enjoy these new pleasures.

The Government was trying to confine the Indians to the reservations that had been set apart for them, but the redskins had been accustomed to roam over the country at will, to follow the game wherever it went, to make war upon each other whenever they felt like it or needed horses; so they resented any attempt to interfere with their entire freedom, and turned fiercely on their white foes wherever they found them, singly or in camps and settlements. The Government, in order to better protect its citizens, erected at intervals outposts garrisoned by troops.

There being no railroads across the continent at this time, goods of all kinds had to be carried in wagons from the nearest railroad station to the fort or point of distribution. The supply of fuel, too, was a matter of great importance. It was in the main a treeless country and wood was scarce. The early prospectors and pioneers had noticed the outcroppings of coal from the deep-cut river banks, but little advantage was taken of this store of fuel till the forts were established and the little steamboats began to ply up and down the Missouri loaded deep with skins and buffalo hides.

Mr. Worth was one of the first to see the value of these coal veins, and he was a leader in developing the mineral resources of the section. He

opened and worked mines as near the different outposts as possible and at convenient points for the supply of coal to the river boats.

The Eastern railroads were stretching their long steel arms westward, and they also needed to be supplied with food for their furnaces.

Mr. Worth had contracted with these coal consumers to open mines which, when in good running order, were to be turned over to them to work. In order to do this it was necessary to travel from place to place, starting the work at intervals along the proposed line so as to be ready when the "steel trail" actually reached them. It was this contract that made it necessary for them to give up the home shack at Bismarck and to journey into hostile country. Mr. Worth could not return to the settlement to his family; the family must therefore come to him in the wilds.

Much of the long winter was spent by the boys in talking over the good times they were going to have when they reached the new country. At times a trapper would come in to get a stock of supplies, and John and Ben listened eagerly to every word he said about his experiences. These tales were old stories to most of the men of the little town, who paid no attention to such commonplace matters, but Charley Green, like the

boys, was seeking information, and he drank in every word as eagerly as they.

Much of Green's ignorance had disappeared, though "Tenderfoot" was still his nickname, and by that he would be called as long as he lived there. He had changed outwardly as well. The Eastern pallor had given place to a good, healthy, bronzed tint, his eye was clear and his hand steady; he had lost weight but had gained in endurance. His gay, expensive outfit of clothes had been succeeded by the more sober and serviceable apparel of the plains: wide, heavy felt hat, flannel shirt, rough trousers with protecting leather overalls or chaps, and high boots. He had learned enough about Western ways to avoid making many blunders, and took a joke at his expense good naturedly when he did occasionally betray himself.

It was not considered polite in Bismarck to inquire anything about a man's past—that was his own business. It was not necessary for a man to give his pedigree and family name in order to be received into the society of his fellows. It was not his past that concerned them, but his present. "Lariat Bill" was quite as good for all practical purposes as his real name, perhaps better, for it was descriptive and identified him at once. In accordance with this unwritten law, no one asked

what Charley Green's idea was in leaving the civilization and culture of Boston for the wild, free, albeit rough, life of the plains; but rumor had it that he came there with the intention of going into ranching. If so, he was wise beyond his generation, for unlike most of his fellows he looked before he leaped.

Tenderfoot and the two boys had struck up quite a friendship. It was quite natural, therefore, knowing as he did the Worths' plans, for him to say one day, towards the end of the winter: "Do you suppose, John, that your dad would take me along on his mining expedition?"

"I dunno," said John, "you'll have to ask the governor when he comes back. I guess he would."

"You see," continued Tenderfoot, "I'm about as tired of this place as you are, and I want to see a little of the country. I guess I could earn my salt as a mule-wrangler anyway."

So it was decided that the young Easterner was to go with the Worths if the head of the house consented.

The dreary winter was beginning to give way to the soft south winds. The snow was fast disappearing and buffalo grass was showing brightly green here and there. The boys had an unusually bad attack of spring fever, for the long-

looked-for time of the pilgrimage was drawing near.

Their father might be expected any day, and then—their delight and anticipation could not be put into words.

Mr. Worth at length came in, loaded down with his pack, his arms, and his heavy winter furs.

Keen and bitter disappointment was in store for the impatient boys. They were told that it would not be safe to move away from the town, for the whole country was full of hostile, well-armed, well-fed Sioux.

The Black Hills of southwestern Dakota had been found to contain gold in paying quantities. This region was considered almost sacred by the Indians and jealously guarded. It was now aggressively penetrated by the bold miners, and this naturally created much bad feeling between them and the original owners. In order to allay this feeling the Government made a treaty with the Indians by which it was agreed that the encroaching miners should be driven out. The disregarding of this treaty or its ineffective enforcement roused the Sioux to open warfare.

The tribes were collecting under the leadership of Sitting Bull and Rain-in-the-Face. Several small skirmishes had been fought and num-

bers of men on both sides had been killed. Small outfits, too, had been wiped out completely by the savage red foe.

It would have been suicidal, therefore, for the Worth family to venture within the enemy's country, as had been previously planned.

Indeed, while there was probably little danger of an attack at this time on Bismarck, the centre of hostilities being many hundred miles to the westward, great precautions were taken even there every night to guard against surprise, and the people, especially the children, never went far afield.

The spring passed and another summer's scorching heat began. Occasionally accounts came in of battles fought and victories won, sometimes by one side, sometimes by the other. It was a time of uncertainty; business enterprise was at a standstill, and, since there was little to do in the frontier town, diversion of any kind was hailed with delight. So the Fourth of July celebration that was to be held at Black Jack's dance hall was looked forward to with great expectations by old and young.

Independence Day at length arrived, and was greeted at the first showing of light in the east by a volley of revolver shots. The celebration was kept up with enthusiasm all day. Tender-

foot made a patriotic speech that took the crowd by storm—he was no tenderfoot in that line, for his college debating society experience served him in good stead.

At sundown the guests began to arrive at Black Jack's, and before an hour had passed the ball was in full swing. It could hardly be called a fashionable assemblage: the men, of whom there were three or four to every woman, were dressed much as usual, spurs and all, except that in compliance with the request placarded prominently, their "guns" were laid aside.

A single fiddler served for an orchestra, and also acted as master of ceremonies, calling out the figures of the dances.

The violin was squeaking merrily and the feet of the dancers thumped the rough boards vigorously, while the lamp lights silhouetted the uncouth figures as they passed between them and the open window.

John and Ben, who were watching from the outer darkness, were suddenly startled by hearing the long, deep whistle of the little steamboat.

"What's that?" exclaimed Ben. "Sounds like the *Will o' the Wisp*, but she hasn't been along the river for a long time."

"Let's go and see," said John. "Must be something doing to bring her down at this time."

The two boys mounted their horses, which stood already saddled, and galloped down to the landing. In a few minutes the boat steamed up out of the darkness, slowed down and made fast to a cottonwood stump.

Hardly had it come to a stop when a man made a running leap to the platform and dashed toward the boys, who were the only persons at the place.

"Where's all the people?" he cried excitedly. "Let me take that horse a minute, sonny."

"Up at Black Jack's," said John, sliding off Baldy's back without delay, for it was evident that the newcomer brought important news.

The stranger mounted and set off at a hard gallop for Main Street. Reaching the brightly lighted place, he jumped off and stumbled through the doorway into the centre of the room.

The fiddler stopped in the middle of a bar, the dancers, who were in the full swing of "all hands around," stood still in wonder, and every eye was fixed upon the intruder. He looked like the bearer of bad news.

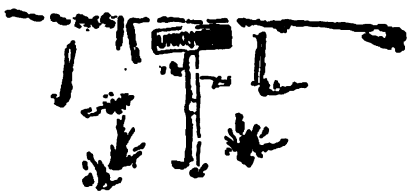
His clothes showed that he had travelled far and fast, and his manner evidenced anything but peace of mind. For an instant all was still. Then Black Jack broke the silence: "Speak out, man! What's up?"

"I've been travelling two days and nights to

bring the news," he panted. "Custer ——" he paused for breath.

"Well, hurry up, will you!" exclaimed Mackenzie, shaking his arm.

"Custer and his men have been wiped out by the Indians on the Little Big Horn!"



CHAPTER IV.

"HITTING THE TRAIL."

The Custer massacre threw the whole country into a spasm of fear.

The killing of three hundred trained fighters and a general, all renowned for their daring and knowledge of Indian warfare, must give the enemy a confidence that would be hard to overcome.

Every one wondered where the next blow would be struck and who would be the next victim. All enterprises were checked, all peaceful journeys postponed. Not till the autumn of the following year was it deemed safe for the Worth family to carry out their plan of "pulling up stakes" and leaving Bismarck.

During the year which had elapsed John and Ben had grown in mind and body. They were sturdy, strong boys, and were a great help to

CUSTER'S COMMAND. (*Page* 53.)

their father. Perfectly able to take care of the stock, they could ride like centaurs and shoot with their "guns" (as the Westerner calls his revolver) with astonishing accuracy. They used to practice at tomato cans fifty yards away and soon became so expert that for nearly every shot a neat round hole appeared in the tin. If you think this easy, try it. One can will probably last you a long while.

Long before, Charley Green had made a formal request to be included in the migrating party and had been accepted. He was really quite a valuable man now, for he had been tried in a number of ticklish places and had shown a solid strength and coolness in the face of danger.

One bright autumn day the pilgrimage began.

Several men were to accompany the family to a mine that had already been located fifty miles away. Here the winter was to be spent, and then, if all went well, another mine might be opened further westward.

The final preparations for moving were soon complete. The household goods were packed into the great lumbering prairie wagons, canvas-topped and wide of beam; the little log-built shack was left intact, its rough, heavy door swinging open.

The frontiersman's household outfit was very

simple. The bedding consisted of blankets; cooking utensils of iron and tin, dining-table furniture of the same materials, a few chairs, a table or two, and the baby's crib completed the list. The Worth family had the largest library in town. It contained their great, brass-bound Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," the Catechism (and how the boys dreaded it!), "Robinson Crusoe," "Scott's Poems," and the "Arabian Nights." These precious books were of course taken along, for though the boys' father read little and lacked even the rudiments of education, he had the pride of ownership.

It can be seen at once that this simple collection of necessaries would not take long to pack and load. Charley Green remarked that "the whole outfit wouldn't be considered security enough for a week's board in Boston."

"That's true," answered Mr. Worth, as he lifted the sewing machine (the only one for miles and miles around) tenderly into the wagon. "But our household stuff is considered very fine, and people come from long distances to use this sewing machine."

"The first of May can't have any terrors for you," persisted the ex-collegian.

Mr. Worth frowned a little, for although Charley's fun was good-natured, he had a keen

dislike to being ridiculed, and had always been accustomed to considering his equipment as something rather grand—as indeed it was, compared with his less fortunate neighbors.

After a final glance around to see that nothing had been left, the head of the family put his wife and baby into the first wagon, but before climbing in himself he called out to John and Ben to go back to the corral, saddle two of the horses, and drive the remaining ones after the wagon train.

The two boys were soon busy catching and saddling the horses. As John was "cinching" up Baldy, he heard the snap of his father's long black-snake whip and the creak of the heavy wheels. Then for the first time he realized that the only home he had ever known was to be left permanently. The old place suddenly became very dear to him, and the thought of leaving it was hard to bear; in fact, he had to bury his face in Baldy's rough, unkempt side to hide the tears that would come despite his efforts.

Ben, on the contrary, was very cheerful and whistled between the sentences of talk he flung at his brother. The two years' difference in their ages showed very plainly in this matter.

"Here, get a move on you, John," he shouted, "my horse's all ready."

The older boy bestirred himself, and in the

rush and hurry that followed he soon forgot his momentary regret.

When they caught up with the wagons they found the procession headed toward the centre of the settlement and almost in its outskirts.

The town had grown considerably both in population and area since we first saw it, and ordinarily the departure of a freighter's outfit would excite but little remark. The exodus of the Worths, however—one of the few families, and one of the very first settlers—was quite an event. Many of their friends were on hand to wish them good speed. The boys felt like "lords of creation" indeed. Were they not bound on a journey of unknown duration, liable to have all sorts of delightful adventures? They held their heads up and pitied their boy friends who were to be left behind—and it must be confessed that the stay-at-homes pitied themselves.

The wagon train made its way slowly down to the river, where the sheriff bade them good-by.

"I'm sorry to have you go," he said, nodding to Mr. and Mrs. Worth. "And those kids of yours," he added, "I wish you could leave them behind; it will be pretty tough on them, and besides, I'm fond of the little beggars. However," he went on, as the boys' father shook his head

"I suppose you know what you're doing. Well, good luck. So long."

"So long," replied the travellers in chorus.

The whole outfit was ferried over the river, passed through the little village of Mandan clustered around the fort, and then struck out across the open prairie. It made quite a procession, the light wagon in front, drawn by two horses and driven by Worth, then a long string of mule teams hitched to the first of a train of prairie schooners, whose white canvas-hooped tops shone in the sun. The cooking utensils in the vehicles and hung under them banged and clattered, the wheels creaked, the teamsters' long whips, which took two hands to wield, cracked and snapped.

At the head of the party rode Charley Green, with his long-eared charges, busy at his self-imposed task of "mule-wrangling." He was new to the business, and it seemed as if the beasts he was herding were aware of this. For a while all would go smoothly, the animals closely bunched, heads down, ears drooped forward, the picture of innocence and dejection; then suddenly a lanky brute would start out from one side as if propelled from a gun, and no sooner had Charley dug the spurs into his pony in his efforts to head it off than another mule would

start off on the other side. Then the whole bunch would scatter, radiating from a common centre like the spokes of a wheel. John, Ben, and one of the men (called Tongue-Tied Ted, because of his few words) took a hand in the game at last, and together they rounded up the stock into a compact bunch again.

All this was very amusing for the old hands, but Charley did not seem to enjoy it.

"Mule-wrangling is no snap," he grumbled. "Why, it's easier to stop a whole rush line than to take care of that gang of long-eared, rail-backed, dirt-colored, knock-kneed horse imitators."

He had to tackle the job alone, however, for only by experience could he learn, and experience is a hard and thorough teacher.

The boys trotted alongside, now riding far ahead, now making their ponies show off near the wagons. Excursions were made from time to time to shoot at prairie dogs, rabbits, and coyotes. But even this grew monotonous after a while, and they began to cast about in their minds for amusement. "Let's go to the river where it makes a bend over there and take a swim," said Ben, at last.

It was no sooner said than done. They were left to look out for themselves much of the time

so they went off without saying a word to any one.

Soon the caravan was lost to view, and after a few minutes' more riding even the shouts of the men and the barking of the dogs could not be heard.

The boys had that delightful feeling of entire freedom and half fear which comes to the inexperienced thrown upon their own resources. The prairie was perfectly still and the heat was scorching, for the sun was still high. It was a little awesome, and for a minute John and Ben wished they were back with their friends. The thought of a cool dip was very enticing, however, and they would both have been ashamed to turn back now, so they cantered along, keeping up each other's courage by shouting and laughing. Reaching the river, they scrambled down the steep slope, leaving their horses to graze on the level, and in a jiffy were enjoying a swim in the "Big Muddy." The bottom was free from quicksands, so the brothers enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content.

They swam, ducked, and dug in the mud, as full of glee as could be. For an hour or more they revelled in their sport; then John dropped the handful of dirt he was about to throw and looked around, half scared. "Hallo," he said,

"it's getting dark. We'd better get a move on." They slid into their clothes as only boys can, and in a few seconds had regained the top of the bank.

The sun, a fiery red ball, was low down in the western sky and almost ready to drop out of sight altogether.

"Why!" exclaimed Ben. "Where are the horses?"

They looked hurriedly around and then scanned the rolling prairie and sage bushes in every direction.

But the horses were not to be seen. Nor was the wagon train in sight. Not a living thing was visible on the horizon; not a sound could be heard anywhere. On every side there were only monotonous clumps of sage, and the sun was getting lower and lower every moment.

They rushed to a knoll and searched again. All around stretched the prairie—bare, still, hopeless. Then they looked at each other for the first time. Ben began to whimper.

"Come, brace up," said John, taking the elder brother's part. "I know the trail; we'll catch up to them in no time."

His tone was cheerful, but he appeared more at ease than he really was. It was not a pleasant situation for even a full-grown man, one well

versed in the signs of the plains, its landmarks, and deceptions.

The boys were in an unfamiliar section of the country, without food or means of transportation, at nightfall. Their lessons of self-reliance stood them in good stead now, and they started off bravely, striking away from the river in the direction of the wagon trail. After walking a half hour they came across the distinct deep rut of wagons.

This was a great encouragement; it was like a friendly grasp of the hand, for they felt that they were now in touch with men and living things, though neither was within sight or sound.

Only the palest kind of twilight now remained, but the trail could be seen quite distinctly and both boys took heart.

"I'd give my gun for a piece of jerked buffalo meat," said Ben.

"Well, I wouldn't mind munching a bean myself," replied his brother. "But say, won't that feed taste good when we get to the camp? Just think of that big fire with the men lying around it, and the wagons drawn in a circle outside all."

"Oh, stop," broke in Ben, peevishly. "I'm hungry enough and tired enough already, and your talk makes me ten times worse."

Hour after hour they tramped along, their

courage ebbing with every step. Expecting when they reached the crest of each little rise to see the bustling camp at the foot of the slope, each time they again took up the weary march with a heavier load of disappointment and uneasiness.

Thirst, as well as hunger, now began to attack them. It was dry weather, and the dust rose into their faces as they walked, tickling throat and nose, and causing the greatest discomfort. From time to time they lingered to rest, but when they stopped the darkness frightened them, and the awful stillness, broken only by the wailing howl of a coyote and the low moan of the rising wind, drove them on relentlessly.

At last Ben declared that he couldn't go any further, but as soon as they stopped his courage failed him and he burst into tears. John comforted him as well as he could, but he was himself at his wits' ends.

"Come along, old man," he urged after a while, "let's have one more try at it."

Again they started off wearily and slowly, John with an arm about his younger brother. They had walked only a few minutes when Ben felt his brother's arm clasp him tighter and heard him give a hoarse shout.

He strained his eyes ahead. There in the

darkness was an indistinct moving mass. They redoubled their efforts, and presently discovered that it was a wagon drawn by a single team that seemed hardly able to stand and moved forward at a snail's pace.

"Did you see anything of a freight outfit along the trail to-night?" said John huskily to the driver.

The man half raised himself from his lounging position. "Freight outfit?" said he, sleepily. "No."

Then he woke up a little more as Ben broke into tears again. Perceiving their woebegone appearance, he sat erect, and for the first time took in the situation. "Why, what are you kids doin' here this time of night? Where's your horses? Where's your people?"

John told the story in a few words, while Ben, quite overcome, leaned his head against his brother's arm and went fast asleep standing up.

"And haven't you had anything to eat since noon?" queried the driver in wonder.

"No, nor nothing to drink," answered John, his voice shaking a little in spite of himself at the remembrance.

"Well, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't help you much. I haven't got a bit of grub myself. Thought I would only be out a little while, and

expected to reach the rest of my outfit by dinner time, so I didn't bring any feed myself. One of my nags gave out, so I couldn't catch the teams. I guess I can give you a little lift, anyhow. But see here!" he ejaculated, "I guess you're on the wrong trail, ain't you? Your folks must have took the other branch way back yonder; they wouldn't be likely to come over this side."

Brave John collapsed at this. He and Ben had been travelling all this weary time in the wrong direction!

"Never you mind, sonny," said the man, kindly. "We'll find some way out of it," he went on after a minute's silence; "those trails join again after a piece. Perhaps you may meet your outfit there. This branch follows a bend in the river, while the other cuts across country and meets it. See?"

"Yes, sir," said John, dejectedly.

"Come, help me get this team of mine started; you'll be sure to find your outfit camped near the fork; there's good water there and they'll wait for you."

Encouraged once more by his words, John lifted Ben bodily and laid him in the wagon. Then, after a good deal of urging with voice and whip, he got the worn-out team in motion.

For half an hour they moved along without a

word being spoken; their new friend relapsed into his huddled-up position, Ben lay asleep in the bottom of the wagon, and John communed with himself. He wondered what his mother thought of their absence, and he felt the responsibility of an elder brother. He knew that the horses would turn up riderless, and that his father would send back over the trail that had been covered by the train, but would not find them. The thought of their anxiety made him doubly impatient at the slow progress made. He longed for Baldy to gallop on and set their minds at rest. Still, they moved along at a pace little faster than a walk. Each step of the weary beasts seemed as if it must be the last.

At length John, who was the only person awake, noticed that the off horse began to sway as he stumbled along. He roused the man at his side and told him he thought the animal was about done for. But the words of warning were hardly out of his mouth when the poor beast dropped like a lump, made a few fruitless attempts to regain his feet, and then lay quiet.

Here was a pretty mess for all hands!

The man, with one fagged horse and one almost as bad, ten miles from camp, with no food or water, on a trail over which hardly any one passed.

The boys, footsore from the long tramp, with a gnawing hunger and parching thirst and nothing to satisfy either, their destination they knew not how far off, and no means of reaching it other than afoot.

There was but one thing to do: set out once more and trust to Providence that the camp would be found at the junction of the two trails and that their strength would hold out long enough to accomplish the journey.

John promised to send some one back with horses and food, if the stranger did not turn up within a reasonable time, and the youngsters then resumed their weary march, John almost carrying his brother.

The moon had come out and showed the boys the deeply marked road. They had but to follow the track, so it became simply a question of endurance and pluck. The simple, hardy life they had always led, and the constant exposure to heat and cold had toughened their little bodies and had given them a reserve fund of strength which now responded to the call upon their utmost powers. Strained as every faculty was, they plodded on doggedly, hour after hour. Just after midnight they topped a little rise, and involuntarily cried out in unison. There ahead of them was a blaze that gave them new life. They

had reached the junction of the two trails, and the camp. The wagons were drawn in a circle just as they had pictured to themselves, the camp fire was burning brightly in a shallow pit (to prevent its spread to the surrounding prairie, and some of the men, wrapped in their blankets, were lying like long, bumpy bundles on the ground, while a bunch of mules were feeding at a little distance, guarded by the "night wrangler."

In the centre of the enclosure, where the ruddy light of the campfire brought out their anxious faces in strong relief, stood the boys' father and mother. John and Ben ran forward as fast as their tired legs could carry them. They shouted —as loud as their dry, dust-coated throats would allow.

It made them gulp simultaneously to see how the expression of the two faces changed; the woman's growing wholly tender and joyful, the man's altered to that of relief rather than joy. John knew from past experience that while the mother would be glad to comfort and caress, the father would not permit any such soft treatment. They would be lucky if they got off with a sharp rebuke.

Mrs. Worth rushed to meet them, but her husband restrained her. "You boys go over to the cook-wagon and get something to eat, then

turn in. We've got to get off soon after daybreak. I'll see what you have to say for yourselves to-morrow."

The cold supper John and Ben indulged in that night would probably not interest the ordinary pet dog of your acquaintance. It consisted of cold, greasy pork and beans, poor cold coffee without milk, and soggy bread, but they thought it was food fit for the gods. Hunger satisfied and thirst quenched, they were glad enough to curl under a wagon, a blanket their only covering and a saddle for a pillow.

Before getting to sleep they heard the teamster who had befriended them come into camp; his team had revived enough to painfully cover the remaining distance to the Worths' outfit.

They had hardly dozed off, it seemed to them, when they heard the cook's shrill call, "Grub p-i-i-i-le," and knew that breakfast was ready and all hands must be astir.

After the blankets had been made into a neat roll and put away in a wagon, breakfast was despatched promptly, for cook, even on the frontier, is an autocratic person, not to be kept waiting.

The meal was much like the supper of the previous night, except that the food was hot. The

boys then went down to the creek and soaked off the dust that had gathered during their long tramp. In an incredibly short time the train had broken camp and was on the move again. The cook's few dishes and pots were given a hasty rinse in the creek and packed, the mules and horses driven in, and the fresh ones harnessed and saddled. The "day wrangler" took the place of the "night wrangler," who promptly lay down in one of the wagons and went to sleep.

The procession fairly moving, John and his brother were called up to explain their absence of the afternoon and night before. This John did with fear and trembling, for he feared his father's wrath. He got off, however, with a severe reprimand and positive orders not to go out of sight of the wagons at any time, and the boys went off congratulating themselves on their lucky escape.

All that day the caravan travelled steadily, stopping only at noon for dinner and for water. Towards evening they came near their destination, reaching a clear creek bordered with green. Up from the stream rose a hill, and half way up was a strange-looking house, part of which seemed to be buried in the side of the slope.

The boys were somewhat surprised when they were told that this was to be their home for the winter.

"Look, John," exclaimed Ben, "we're going to live in a hole in the ground."

CHAPTER V.

IN A MINING CAMP.

"More like a tunnel with a porch to it, I should say," said John, as they approached the "dug-out."

Indeed, the Worths' new home was an unprepossessing abode even after the familiar furniture was in position, the bunks made ready for use, and a fire built in the fire-place.

As its name showed, it was merely a hole or tunnel in the slope of the hill, with a small log house built out from it. But though it was not luxurious, it was warm in winter and cool in summer, the earth protecting it from extremes of both heat and cold. The bare ground packed hard served for a floor, and the fire-place was set far back in the underground portion of the room, its smoke outlet being a chimney of sod projecting through the roof.

Into this new and strange dwelling the household goods were carried, a fire was built, and in a

short while the place began to assume the appearance of a home. While this was being done, the men looked up their own habitations, and found that other dug-outs, not so large or well finished, but fairly comfortable, were all ready for occupancy. The mine had been opened already, and the workmen had previously constructed these huts, half caves, half houses, for themselves and for the "boss's" family.

It was all a new experience for the boys, and they investigated everything with great interest. The idea of living in a hole in the ground struck them for quite a while as very funny, and they made jokes without end about it to each other.

The wagons had been placed in the wide creek "bottom"—the space cut out of the bank by the current, which had since retreated to its present narrower channel. This "bottom," for years and years the stream's bed, was well supplied with rich alluvial soil, and was in consequence luxuriantly covered with fresh grass and vegetation of all kinds.

"I tell you, Jack," called Ben, when the boys scrambled down the steep path to the creek, "this is something like. Why, I can see bottom—and I declare, if I didn't see a fish sneak out of that rooty place there."

He hopped on one foot and then on the other

in his excitement, and then, somehow—neither he nor John could ever explain it—he suddenly found himself splashing in the clear stream. John caught hold of his heels and dragged him out face down. His head had scraped the soft bottom and his nose had made a beautiful furrow in the mud.

"What were you trying to do?" inquired John, as soon as he could get his breath. "Catch the fish in your mouth?"

When Ben turned, spitting mud and digging it out of his nostrils, John almost exploded with laughter. "Maybe you think it's funny," spurted the younger boy, "but wait till you come to make a mud scow of yourself; then you won't laugh quite so much."

John struggled to suppress his mirth, and after a while succeeded—as long as his brother's mud-be-plastered visage was not in sight.

Instantaneous sketches of the positions in slipping and diving.

Face washed and good humor restored, the boys wandered further down the stream on a trip of discovery. New delights opened at every turn. A mile or so below the camp a beaver dam was found, and as they drew near, one of those clever, industrious little beasts shot down the slide they had constructed, with a *kerflop* into the pool. Here was sport indeed. The boys wondered how many of the curious animals the

brown, mud-plastered, dome-shaped houses contained. The doors to these houses were under water, and only the second story was above its level.

"I tell you what," said John, "we'll have to catch some of those beggars. Their skins are worth money." And so they vowed to remember the spot and capture some of the inhabitants of this semi-submarine village.

A little further along they came to a clearly marked path, the edge of which (the centre was beaten hard) was indented with small hoof prints of deer and antelope. They saw, too, the cushioned print of the great prairie wolf. Evidently this was the haunt of game of all kinds.

On the way back the boys had little leisure to examine the paradise they had discovered, for the sun was sinking fast and they had wandered further than they realized. An inviting pool was noted, however, that would serve for a swimming hole, and Ben unhesitatingly dubbed this "plumb bully." John prevented him from plunging into it right away only by main force and the reference to his ducking, but he could not keep him from taking off his moccasins and wading in whenever an opportunity occurred.

As they neared the camp the last rays of the sun glinted down on them. The preparations

for the evening meal were in full swing: the clatter of tin dishes mingled with the clatter of tongues, and the smoke pouring from the sod chimneys bore a most savory odor that made the boys realize they were hungry.

"I wish we had a rifle," John was saying. "We could have got one of those ducks we saw down the creek for supper."

"Well, I'm going to have one, and a repeater, too," returned Ben. "I'll have one if I——"

"Look out!" yelled his brother, interrupting him. At the same moment he jumped to his side and pulled him violently back. Ben almost fell, but his brother held him up and dragged him still further.

"Look!" he said, breathless with excitement.

Ben's eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger. There in the trail on which they had been walking, on the exact spot where he had been about to plant his bare foot, lay a big diamond-backed rattler, asleep in the last rays of the setting sun.

"Phew! that was a close call," exclaimed John. "You want to keep a sharp lookout when you go barefoot. I can't watch out for you all the time."

The younger boy, pretty badly scared, put on his moccasins without delay and kept his eyes on

the trail after that. The rest of the way was covered in almost absolute silence, for the escape had been a narrow one, and both were sobered by it.

The plain, wholesome supper over, the boys were glad enough to turn in, and though the bunks were anything but soft and the surroundings unfamiliar, the exertions of the day before and the hardships of the night preceding it put them to sleep in short order.

It was not long before the whole camp was wrapped in slumber. The stock had been allowed to run free, it being well known that they would not stray far from the good feed that the creek bottom afforded. All was silent without and only the heavy breathing of the sleepers disturbed the quiet within. "Spuds," the dog, from time to time growled and barked inwardly as he dreamed of a fierce chase after a gopher or jack rabbit. At last even he subsided.

This absolute quiet was presently disturbed by a howl,—long, wailing, and dreadful,—that sounded through the low roof as if the thing that caused it must be in the room itself. Ben jumped up so suddenly that he struck his head on his brother's bunk above him.

"What's that?" he cried, shaking with fear at a sound he could not explain. John, his head

stuck out of the berth above, was frightened himself, and could not explain the noise.

Again the fearful wail came, this time not so distinct, but quite as awe-inspiring. The boys drew a long breath of relief when their father got up, took the rifle from the two pegs that supported it, and went to the door. His evident calmness reassured them. As he reached the door and fumbled with the latch, John and Ben heard a soft but rapid patter of feet and then his muttered exclamation:

"Plague take those pesky wolves, howling at a man's door in the dead of night."

So the boys made acquaintance with the great, gray prairie wolf at close quarters the first night of their stay afar from civilization.

In a few days the men were in full swing at the work for which they had come to this point. The boys were too young to take part in the mining operations, but even they had their chores to perform at certain times of the day, after which they were at liberty to do much as they pleased, within certain well-known limits. Their first duty on being wakened between four and five was to round up the stock and drive it in. This was not such easy work as it sounds. The journey in search of the animals was long, and was made on an empty stomach in the cold, raw morn-

ing air. Even when they were found, it was difficult to get them moving towards the camp. The animals seemed at times to be endowed with diabolical perversity, and would resist all efforts to start them running in the right direction. The mules and horses once corraled, the boys had an appetite for breakfast that a dyspeptic would give a fortune to acquire. After that hearty meal the brothers supplied the camp with wood and water and did what odd jobs were required about the home. This completed their work for the time.

After these duties were performed one morning, John and Ben bethought them of the beaver village, and their spirits rose in anticipation of the sport. A full trapper's outfit had been brought to the camp. They got this out and made up a pack containing several steel traps (having strong jaws armed with sharp teeth and set off by pressure of the animal's foot on the trigger plate), an axe, some fishing line and tackle in case a good pool was encountered, the always present revolvers and ammunition, and a small store of food.

Though it was their first experience in trapping beaver, the boys were well versed in the theory of the business; they had never let an opportunity go by to learn all they could about such

sport. So they started with a fair knowledge at least of the habits and ways of the beaver whom they were to outwit. Their journey down to the dam led them along the creek, and they noted several inviting pools where bullheads and trout were likely to lurk, planning to come back and try to catch a string after they had set their traps.

Reaching the dam, they set to work. John being the elder, at once took command of the expedition. "You chop down some brush," he ordered, "while I go over and punch a few holes in the dam. These little beggars know a thing or two and won't run into an uncovered trap."

"What do you want to cut down brush for?" questioned Ben, as he shouldered the axe and prepared to obey.

"Why, you see, when I break the dam the water will rush out and show up the entrance to the houses; then after we go away the beaver will get to work to build it up again, and will go for the brush you have chopped down and get caught in the traps we will set in it. See?"

Ben's eyes danced at the prospect, and he raced off to do his part.

The boys were soon out of sight of each other, and John busied himself on the top of the dam with a strong stick, poking holes ruthlessly through it. He found it firmer than he had ex-

pected, and it took all his strength and skill to tear it open. He pushed his stick in vertically, in order to get a good purchase, and, encountering an unexpected obstacle, put his whole weight into the thrust. All of a sudden the obstruction gave away, the stick sank down till his hands struck the ground, he lost his balance and fell headlong into the deep part of the stream.

The water was well over his head, and after a few minutes' struggling, he began to realize that he was in a nasty situation. The dam was composed mostly of slippery mud, which gave him no hold, and burdened by his soaked clothing, he could not swim to the bank. The water was icy cold, and he felt almost numb at once. He called to Ben, but could not make him hear. Then he sank beneath the surface.

Again he went down, but he kept his presence of mind and struggled with might and main to gain a foothold on the slimy slope. In spite of his efforts to keep on top, he sank a third time, but this time barely below the level of his eyes. His work on the dam had accomplished its purpose and the water was rushing out through a leak, so that the depth was decreasing every minute. He realized that if he could keep up a little longer he would be all right.

Again he sank, too tired to do more, but this

time was able to keep his mouth above water by standing on tiptoe and stretching his neck to its fullest extent.

Before long the water had receded so much that he could wade ashore, though at times his feet slipped into holes that let him down until he was entirely under water. Reaching the bank, he dragged himself up and lay down flat, for the time quite exhausted.

He was more breathless than hurt, however, and in a short time was able to get up and crawl over to a sunny spot.

Ben came up presently and was inclined to joke with his brother on his mishap; but after John had told his story he took it more seriously.

The boys noted with satisfaction that the water was now so low that the submerged entrances to the beaver houses were visible. They therefore hastened to place their traps in the brush that Ben had cut. They then moved up the creek to the fishing hole they had noted, to await developments and at the same time try their luck at fishing. Ben took the line while John stripped off his water-soaked clothes, hung them up to dry, and then lay down in a warm sunny spot. It was late in the fall, and the wind proved too searching for comfort in this condition, so a fire was built, by which he dried and warmed himself.

Beaver Chip.

The fish were hungry and bit early and often, with the result that the pile of bullheads and trout on the bank was soon a goodly sight to behold. A few of them John cleaned and hung over the fire with a forked stick. The meal which followed was enjoyed to the full, and by the time it was finished John's wet clothes were fairly dry. Ben was for looking after the traps right away, but his brother's more experienced counsel prevailed, and they agreed to visit them at the earliest opportunity the following morning.

The first minute after the next morning's work was finished they hurried to the scene of John's accident. After considerable searching (for they had neglected to chain the traps fast to a log) they found one. In it was a beaver's foot, well provided with claws for digging, and gnawed off clean above the joint. The brave little beast had cut off his own leg to save his life.

"Well, I'm jiggered," said Ben. "If that don't beat all. Don't you wish you had come back when I wanted you to?"

"No; the beaver didn't show up till after dark, probably. Besides, there are three other traps, and there must be something in 'em or they would be where we left 'em."

They searched and searched and called each

other names because of their carelessness in not making the traps fast. Finally they bethought them of the possibility of the little animals' dragging the cruel steel jaws with them to their houses, which, instinct would teach them, were their only safe refuges.

Sure enough, there were two of them dead, drowned at their own door; the third was alive and full of energy. Timid usually, the beaver when caught or brought to bay will fight courageously. Ben stooped to drag the trap and its captive out, but drew back so suddenly that his head struck John, who was also leaning over, a scientific blow on the nose. That maltreated and indignant organ began to bleed freely, and it did not console John to any great degree to learn that the little beast had turned on Ben and that he had come within an ace of having a finger bitten off by its long yellow teeth. He was so alarmed at this savage pugnacity that, without paying any attention to the rap he had given John, he still retreated, keeping his eyes on the hole. This was needless, however, for the animal was hopelessly entangled. A shot from John's revolver soon put the little creature out of its misery and enabled them to drag it out without danger.

They returned to camp, triumphantly bearing three splendid beavers. But John held his hand

over his swelling nose and fast blackening eyes: he could afford to accept with equanimity all taunting references to his injured member, such as, "Your nose is out of joint," and "What a black look you have," for he had turned the tables on Ted, who had laughed at him, calling out: "Sonny, you think you're going on a beaver hunt, but you're really going on a wild goose chase."

Many more trips did the two boys make to this and other beaver villages, and the pile of salted skins grew to quite respectable proportions by the time the ice began to form on the creek.

With winter came many added pleasures and some extra work and discomfort. Paths to the mine and to water had to be dug in the early morning through the snow that had drifted during the night, and this work was added to the boys' regular tasks. The drawing of water had now become more difficult, for a hole had to be cut in the ice every time. Gathering wood, too, was not easy, since it was necessary to burrow for it through the white blanket of snow.

One of the men of the camp was a Swede called "Yumping Yim," because of his racial inability to pronounce the letter "J." He showed the boys how to make snowshoes or skees, long strips of wood curved up at the front, the bottom

slightly concave to give a purchase on the crust and prevent them from slipping sideways, the top convex and rising slightly from toe and heel to the centre where the foot rested. The boys soon became proficient in the use of these and sometimes travelled considerable distances on them.

Exhilarating trips they were, over the crusted snow, when swift, breathless slides were taken down the hills, and skimming jumps from one level to another. It was on one of these trips that John and Ben saw for the first time a herd of buffalo, their great, brown, closely-packed bodies looking like an undulating sea of fresh earth against the whiteness of the snow. With them were large numbers of antelope, these weaker animals profiting by the ability of the powerful buffalo to break into the drifts and uncover the scanty herbage.

The boys skimmed back to camp, and soon all the men formed themselves into a hunting party. Luck was with them. The whole party crept softly up, using every bit of cover that could be found. Then there was a whispered consultation, rifles were levelled, Mr. Worth kicked a lump of snow as a signal, and five guns barked out together. John and Ben dashed forward in wild excitement to find three antelopes lying dead. Without stopping, the hunters pressed on

after the flying animals, and by nightfall a row of antelope hung high up against the log portion of the dug-out. Since the boys had no rifles of their own and the family Winchester was in use, they had to be content with long shots with revolvers.

During the excitement following one of the volleys, Ben, who had lingered behind, saw what he thought was a wounded animal. He quickly raised his pistol and fired. As he did so, the figure rose and stood upright. It was Charley Green! His winter clothing, like that of the boys, was made of deerskin, his cap of the pelt of the musk-rat—even his hands and feet were covered with deerskin soled with buffalo hide. The deception had been complete, all too complete, Charley thought, when he heard what a narrow escape he had had. Ben shivered when he realized what might have happened, and registered a mental vow to let any future deer get away rather than run the risk of its being deer only in hide and man beneath.

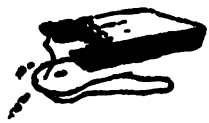
The boys had learned to cut out and make their own winter deer-hide clothing, caps, shirts, mittens, and "packs," or boots, soled with buffalo hide, hair side in; so they always had plenty to do when indoors. Most of the days were spent on their skees. They learned many new things and

many ways of getting along under their new conditions. For instance, a snow house had been dug in a big drift which extended out over the ice-covered creek, and a fire was built inside which speedily melted a hole through to the water. It was so much warmer under the blanket of snow that this did not freeze over. Through it the boys drew the supply of water and caught many a fine string of fish.

The long winter evenings were spent around the big fireplace, where the men made or patched clothes, told stories, played cards, and smoked. The camp was cut off from the world by the miles and miles of deep white snow which overspread the land in every direction. There was no danger from Indians, for even they could not move under difficulties so insurmountable. Wolves nightly came down from the hills and left their footprints on the snow about the house, and especially under the row of frozen deer which swung from a high support—the winter supply of meat killed after freezing weather set in. Both night and day the coyotes howled and answered each other from the high points round about, with their wuh, wuh, wuh-aou-u-u-u-u-wuh-wuh. On moonlight nights the scene from the front door was entrancing. The wide, white valley stretched up and down as far as the eye could see,

and the reaching white ridges of snow and utter silence suggested illimitable distance. When the wind blew, the fine snow slid along the encrusted surface, making a noise like hissing water on a pebbly beach, while the finer particles, rising in the air, created lunar rainbows of surpassing beauty. Here indeed was loneliness, loveliness, and solemn immensity.

Sleep Shots.



CHAPTER VI.

A SNOWSHOE RACE.

"I tell you what," said Ben, one day when the boys were off on their skees, "if we only had a sled, what fun we'd have down these hills!"

"Well, what's the matter with making one?" answered John, the ever-ready. "It would be great; this crust is smooth as glass; we'd just fly."

At once they turned in their tracks and sped for home to carry out their plan.

"I'll beat you in," said Ben.

"I'll bet you won't."

They started off evenly at the top of a slope. A few long, half-stepping, half-sliding strokes gave them impetus enough to slide. Both crouched now in order to lessen the wind resistance and to avoid the chance of losing their balance. They were very evenly matched; for while John was the stronger, his brother was light and not so apt to break through the crust. Down they rushed with ever-increasing speed, the particles of snow rising like spray before

them. The swishing, crunching noise grew into a hum as they sped faster and faster. At first Ben forged ahead—he had got a better start—then John's weight began to tell and he gained inch by inch. Ben crouched down still lower, making his body in a compact little ball, but in spite of all he could do his brother gained on him. Now he was even, now a little ahead, and now only his back could be seen by the younger. The end of his scarf was standing out behind him like a painted stick. The distance gradually increased until perhaps twenty yards of glistening snow lay between them. Ben was watching intently for any slight grade of which he might take advantage. All at once he noticed that John had disappeared.

Almost at the same moment he too began to drop. The racers had been watching each other so closely that neither had noticed that they were approaching the edge of a great drift. John had sailed over first and landed right side up some eight feet below, but so solidly that he broke through the crust and stopped short, falling forward on his face. The instant of warning that Ben had, had put him on his guard: he landed lightly and sped on, hardly checked.

"You will beat me, eh!" he shouted derisively to his discomfited brother, as he shot past.

John scrambled up and started again, but the incline was now very short, and by the time he reached the level Ben was far in advance and going well. It was a long, stern chase. However, the older boy's strength and weight were great advantages now, and within half a mile the two were on even terms again. For a time they raced side by side, arms swinging in unison, legs going like piston rods. Their feet were kept absolutely straight, and so the long skates ran exactly parallel, for if either foot should be turned in or out ever so lightly, one skate would cross the other and the skater would be tangled up so quickly that he would not know what was the matter.

The brothers were now sliding along side by side, each straining every nerve to pass the other; breath came in short puffs and showed on the frosty air like the exhaust steam of a locomotive; perspiration began to appear, and the effort they were putting forth was evidenced in the strained look on their faces.

Faster and faster they went, skimming along the level like a pair of swallows. They were going too fast to be careful of their steps, and Ben turned his right foot a little in. Instantly the skates crossed in front, tripped him, and down he went head foremost into the snow. His left

skee slipped off, flew towards John, caught between his legs, and threw him over backwards. For a moment there was the utmost confusion. The boys were stretched out, heads almost buried in the snow, feet kicking wildly, and the long skees beating the air like flails. Finally these were kicked off, and the crestfallen racers managed to get right side up. After much floundering they got their skees on again and continued their journey, this time at a more deliberate pace. They disputed all the way home as to which was the faster, and finally agreed that the momentous question could only be settled satisfactorily by another match.

When they reached camp, a couple of boards, a saw, a hatchet, and some nails were secured. They sawed and chopped out the sides, nailed on a couple of cross pieces for the seat and a diagonal strip to brace the whole thing. This much was easy, but both were at a loss to find anything for runners until Ben remembered that strips of flat steel had been used on some of the canned meat boxes. These were stripped off, hammered flat, and nailed at each end to the sides of what really began to look like a conventional sled; the seat board was fastened on and holes were bored for the leading rope.

The boys looked at their handiwork with no

little pride and pronounced it as fine a cutter as the eastern variety. To be sure it was not beautiful to look at, and did not bear any highly flourished name like "Flyaway" or "P. D. Q.," but it did not lack decoration altogether, for on one side was branded "Use Higgins' Soap," while the other commemorated "Ruby Brand Tomatoes."

In spite of its roughness and clumsiness it was possessed of good speed and strength enough to withstand all the ill-usage the boys gave it. When the snow was soft they used broad runners made of barrel staves, which they made fast to each side, and thus turned their sled into a toboggan.

If John and Ben wanted anything they had to make it or earn enough to buy it—money was not so plentiful that it could be spent on toys and mere amusements, and so they frequently had to devise ways of getting the things they longed for. John had made up his mind that he must have a saddle, bridle, spurs, and quirt (a short, flexible, braided whip) of his own; and when he found that none of these things would be given him, he determined to earn enough money to buy them. Ben, too, had set his heart on owning a repeating rifle (a style of arm that was rather rare in those days) and so the brothers agreed to work together at trapping, mining, or turning

a penny in any way that offered. The sum total was to be divided in the spring, when each would buy the long-desired articles.

As spring drew near, Mr. Worth decided to move along and open another mine to the westward, the first one being now in good working order.

Again the family packed up their household goods, abandoned the dug-out that had sheltered them during the long winter months, and started off on a pilgrimage. The spring was well advanced and the verdure of the prairie was in its prime. Wild flowers were plentiful and the air was filled with the melody of the song birds, that of the meadow lark being sweetest and most sustained. Robins, thrushes, plover, and curlews—all did their share to make spring beautiful.

Many prairie-dog villages were passed. The queer little beasts sat on the mounds of earth beside the holes that served for homes, their curiosity drawing them out. The travellers took snap shots at them, but they were as quick as lightning and never stayed above ground long enough to allow of careful aim.

John's industry had made him the proud possessor of a new saddle, whose creaking was music in his ears, and even old Baldy seemed to be pleased with his finery, for he pranced around

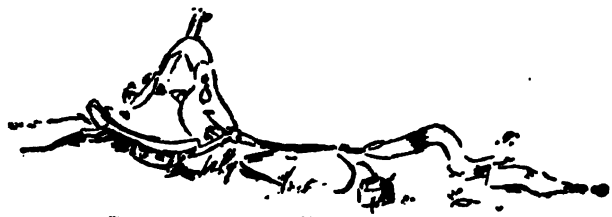
like a two-year-old and arched his neck in a way that seemed to say, "I'm about the finest thing a-top of this earth." Ben had achieved his aim also, and was the owner of a brand-new repeating Spencer rifle, the result of the sale of the winter's catch.

As the train went further westward the trail grew more and more indistinct, and it became the duty of the boys to go ahead and trace it out. Later, when even the barely discernible wheel tracks had disappeared, it was necessary for them to pick out the best route and also to find the camp sites.

This duty was a delightful one, for new country was continually opening before them, and adventures of all kinds might offer at any moment.

"Ain't those antelopes over there by that little hill?" said John one day, pointing to one side.

"That's right," answered Ben. "What's the matter with chasing them?" He spoke with the authority of the hunter. Possessing the rifle, no



opportunity to exploit it was ever allowed to slip; nor, if the truth be told, was John slow in calling attention to his saddle, spurs, and fringed leather chaps.

"All right," said John. "We've never been on an antelope hunt alone."

The boys went off at right angles from the direction they had been taking and rode down a shallow ravine or coulie in order to keep out of sight of the game. They rode slowly along till they reached the end of the depression; here they dismounted and each tied the forelegs of his horse with the rope he carried on his saddle-horn: they were not going to travel afoot again if they could help it. It was now necessary to cross the open prairie in plain view of the animals they sought. Advantage was taken of a well-known characteristic of antelopes—their curiosity. John pulled the handkerchief from his neck and began to wave it slowly to and fro over his head as he walked. Ben followed in his brother's tracks, making himself as inconspicuous as possible and fingering the lock of his repeater to be sure that it was in good working order.

The boys drew nearer and nearer, and the flagging was kept up persistently; but it did not seem to have any effect, for the animals were all looking the other way. Still they drew nearer; their

eyes were fixed on their quarry, the rifle held ready, every nerve tense, each heart beating furiously with excitement.

Then it was seen that the antelopes were attracted by the white tops of the wagons, which were moving slowly along over the plain. The wagon train was "flagging" them. Now if the hunters could get within range before the spell of curiosity had been satisfied, all would be well.

The boys moved cautiously along till they came to a sunken "buffalo wallow," a muddy place frequented by the bison for the sake of the moisture. This afforded the shelter that was needed. Attracted by the flapping canvas wagon-tops, the unsuspecting animals drew slowly near the hiding place.

"Oh! if they would only come just a little closer," said Ben under his breath, "I'd have them sure."

Once they stopped and sniffed the air, but just as Ben was about to chance a long-distance shot, they moved on again.

"Now, Ben!" said John, excitedly.

For an instant the stock of the rifle rested closely against the boy's cheek—then the shot rang out. Almost simultaneously the biggest of the herd leaped into the air, then fell flat to the ground. The others stood still, bewildered.

"Good! Now for another one," whispered John. Again the rifle was raised and again its deadly crack sounded forth. Another antelope bounded up, ran frantically a few yards, and dropped. At this the rest of the herd made off like the wind, and in a few minutes were mere specks on the horizon.

"Well, I must say," said Ben, exultingly, "I thought once that I would rather have your saddle and outfit, but now—" he slapped the stock of his rifle affectionately—"I wouldn't swap if you gave me Baldy to boot."

"Baldy to boot, eh? Why, I wouldn't swap that horse for a whole stack of rifles." And John moved off in indignation to get the horses, while Ben went over to the spot where the game lay.

The carcasses were packed on Ben's horse, both boys mounting Baldy. They were welcomed heartily at the camp, for fresh meat was at a premium, and any change of diet was an event of prime importance.

"That gun of yours must be chained lightning," said Ted. "I didn't suppose you could hit the side of a hill at fifty yards."

Many days of travelling followed over country that had apparently never been covered by a wagon before.

During this long journey the boys came to know the men of the party very well. They were apt to be sharply divided into good and bad, for in those rough times people showed their real characters without reserve.

Charley Green still continued with the company, and he was the boys' greatest friend; but Tom Malloy, who joined the expedition just before it started out for the new camp, soon got into John's good graces. He was a man of varied talents: a gambler and saloon keeper when times were good; a miner, cow-puncher, or hunter when his money ran out. Rough, quick-tempered, and as ready with his fists as with his "gun," he was nevertheless possessed of a great heart and a loyalty to his friends that nothing could shake. Like many of his race he loved a fight and delighted to have a lively "argument" with a man. John's boldness and aggressiveness pleased him greatly, and he looked the boy over, enumerating his good points over to himself: his broad chest, sturdy legs and arms, his clear eyes and fearless look all showed to Malloy's experienced eye that he would make a first-rate boxer.

"I'll show that youngster how to put up his hands sure," he said to himself.

It was a tiresome journey, long and monotonous, but enlivened now and then by a hunt or

pitted with half-concealed badger holes, and in the bottoms were many spots where a horse might easily be mired. Baldy, however, knew his business and carried his rider over awkward places safely. John was congratulating himself on the successful conclusion of his errand when he came to the bank of what was in the early spring a roaring torrent, but which now lacked even a trickle of water. To the edge of this cut Baldy approached cautiously. John, anxious to get back to the wagons and report, urged him on. With a shake of his head that seemed to say: "Well, you are the boss, so here goes; but I don't like the looks of it," the pony went forward, gathering his hind legs under him to make his usual slide—when the ground beneath him gave way. Horse and rider went rolling down the slope, but as John felt himself falling he loosened his foot from the stirrup and leaped off, just in time. Boy and steed arrived at the bottom about the same time, but separately. John's mouth, eyes, nose, and ears were full of dirt and dried grass; in fact, he always declared that he ate his proverbial peck of dirt then, all at once; but he soon discovered that, barring a few bruises and a badly hurt pride, he was all right. As soon as he got the dust out of his eyes and realized that the earth had not risen, out of special spite against him, he looked

added to the danger by undermining the banks in unexpected places.

One morning John was sent out on Baldy (his constant companion and faithful friend) to pick out, if possible, an easier way. Boy and horse started out on a smart trot, each having full confidence in the other—as was necessary, for almost as much depended on the sagacity of the steed in the matter of picking a way on dangerous ground as in the intelligence of the rider. It was a task of considerable responsibility that was put on John's shoulders; the route was difficult enough to puzzle a professional civil engineer. Baldy was left to find his own way while his rider looked ahead to choose a road that could be travelled by the wagons. From time to time it became necessary to go down the almost perpendicular side of a coulie, when the horse would hunch his hind-legs, keeping his forelegs stiff and stretched out to their fullest extent. Then he would fairly slide down on his tail.

John had found a place that he thought suitable for the night's camp, had traced out a way by which it might be reached, and had turned his pony back towards the wagons.

He thought to himself, as they slid down one bank and scrambled up the other, that it would be a bad place to be thrown. The surface was

CHAPTER VII.

A BUFFALO HUNT.

Many weeks were spent in the migration, and it became exceedingly monotonous and tiresome before their destination was at last sighted. When, one beautiful afternoon, Mr. Worth pointed ahead to a rolling knoll covered with trees and announced that there was their future home, John and Ben set up a wild cheer and dashed ahead to examine the spot. Camp was pitched on the banks of the Yellowstone, and dug-outs were made—the cave part first and then the outer portion of substantial logs. Two large cabins were constructed for the family's dwelling and kitchen, and several more for the men, of whom there were many, this being an important mine.

No time was lost in settling, and in an incredibly short while the household belongings were in place, the provisions stowed away safely, and the regular camp routine begun. It was necessary to get a considerable portion of the tunnel driven

before frost came. The opening was made horizontally into the side of the hill and continued in a straight line until the vein of coal was struck, when the tunnel had to follow it in whatever direction it went.

The boys were to be initiated into real miner's work at this camp. They were well grown, strong lads, fully able to do their share. During the preliminary digging of the drift they did little beyond their regular chores, except to drive the teams that carted away the earth from the mouth of the cave.

The important duty of supplying the camp with fresh meat was also entrusted to them, and it was not long before every haunt of furred and feathered thing that lived within a radius of miles around was known to them.

Within a few weeks after the establishment of the camp all preliminary work had been completed and the mine was ready for business. To facilitate the delivery of coal to daylight, a rough railroad had been built; its tracks were of wood, its rolling stock one small, four-wheeled box car, its motive power, Jerry the mule. Of this underground railway John was installed as president, board of directors, general manager, inspector general, passenger and freight agent, chief engineer, and superintendent of motive power. One

day he was engaged in his many brain-taxing duties, the most trying of which was keeping the motive power "moting." The flaring lamp in his hat showed but little of the mule's tough hide, but that little the superintendent belabored lustily. The little car rumbled and bumped along the rough wooden rails on its way to one of the rooms where the coal was being dug. John whistled cheerily to himself and occasionally interrupted the melody to shout into the mule's wagging ears: "Git up, Jerry!" Soon a point of yellow light appeared far off in the darkness, and as the lumbering car went on it grew in size and strength until its nature could be made out distinctly.

"Hello, Ben," shouted the young driver to his brother, whose cap-light had showed so clearly up the tunnel. "You'd better oil the hinges of that door; they squeak like a hungry rat."

The mule had stopped before a great door which blocked the way; it was so placed as to change the ventilating current of air, and it was Ben's duty to open and close it after each loaded or empty car. He sat in a little recess of the wall and pulled the door open and shut with the aid of a rope.

"It's mighty lonesome here," said he. "Seems as if I couldn't stand it sometimes, so I brought

along the 'Arabian Nights' to-day. Been reading about Aladdin; he was underground, too, but all he had to do was to rub a lamp and he just wallowed in pearls, diamonds, and things, while I sit here all day for half a dollar, and do nothing but open and shut this door for you and your old mule."

"Yes, I know all about him," answered John, as he drove through the doorway.

"'Tisn't true, any way," shouted Ben after him. "Couldn't be. Aladdin was a Chinaman, and no Chink ever made even a dollar a day."

"Guess you're right, but don't get lonesome," the voice came echoing back through the darkness, mingled with the rumble of the car and the sharp slap of the stick on poor Jerry's flank.

For a month or more John continued to drive the mule and Ben tended the door. It was late one afternoon, and the younger boy was feeling very tired of living away from the sun and the bright fresh air; the darkness and dankness oppressed him not a little, so he was glad to hear John's strong voice singing:

"Down in the coal mine,
Underneath the ground,
Digging dusky diamonds
All the year around."

"I'd sing too if I was getting a dollar 'stead of a half, and had a chance to see daylight once in a while," grumbled Ben as his brother stopped to talk a bit.

"Hold on a while and don't get excited," counselled the elder. "I'm going to be promoted, and what's the matter with you moving up too?"

"Why? How?" inquired the discontented one eagerly.

"I'm going to be a regular miner; going to work with Bill Cooper, best miner out, father says."

"Then I'll drive Jerry and gather in the dollar," cried Ben. "But who'll tend door?"

For a minute the boy's face showed his disappointment; then he smiled again as the thought came of a way out of the difficulty. A friendly Indian camp was located across the river, and the boys, white and red, often came together for all sorts of sports.

"Why not get 'Coyote-on-a-hill' to work the door while I run the car?" said Ben exultingly. "He'd be scared to death at first, but I'll tell him about the fifty cents a day and that will brace his nerve."

And so it turned out. The Indian boy took Ben's place, while John turned over Jerry to his brother and cast in his fortunes with Bill Cooper.

"Coyote-on-a-hill" was pretty badly scared the first day, but Ben gave him a word of encouragement whenever he went by, and never failed to remind him of the money he was making, so he stuck it out like a man, and presently got quite used to the dreary darkness.

Both of the Worth boys expressed themselves as pleased with the change; what Jerry thought of it he never remarked.

John found his new work anything but easy. Bill Cooper was a fearless miner and a hard worker, and his assistant had all he could do to keep up with the task set for him. It was necessary first to cut under the mass of coal that was to be dislodged; to do this John had to lie on his side and so swing his pick in a cramped position. To make the vertical cut was not much easier, for he found it hard to work squeezed in between the walls of coal as the crevice deepened. The bottom and side cuts made, he bored holes (round holes with a flat drill, the knack of which he acquired only after long practice and a choice collection of smashed fingers) and then tamped in the paper cartridge of powder. When the fuse was in place, all that was needed to complete the work was a light from his lamp. The former was plain, straightforward hard work, the latter sport. The fuse lay like a snake just sliding into

its hole, the place was quiet as death and as dark as a tomb, except where the flickering glare of the young miner's lamp shone; his face was covered with coal dust, through which his eyes peered with unnatural prominence.

He would take the lamp from his cap, stoop down and touch the bare flame to the end of the snake fuse; it would immediately begin to sputter sparks, and as John drew back for safety he could watch it eat its way towards the black wall and the powder within it. The red sparks drew nearer and nearer the hole, then, after a spiteful little shower, disappeared. It seemed a long time to the miner waiting behind his protecting shield before the rending, shaking report sounded, followed by the glare of the explosion and the rattle of the falling coal. Then Ben soon turned up with Jerry, and both boys shovelled the loose coal of varying-sized lumps into the car.

Bill Cooper, though insisting that John must do his share, generally took the hardest and most dangerous places himself; so it came about one day that the boy worked at the vertical cut while his partner cut under, propping up the mass of coal (with wooden logs cut for the purpose) as he went in deeper.

The work was hard, and neither man nor boy spent any breath in talking. The dull ring of

the pick was the only sound. Deeper and deeper grew the crevice; soon only John's foot was visible and Cooper had disappeared entirely under the overhanging ledge of coal; only the faint glowing of the light and the sound of the tools betrayed the workmen. It was dirty, tiring, dangerous work. At any moment that great mass of mineral might fall if the supports were not properly placed or the king-brace happened to be lodged in a soft spot.

"Come out if you want to save your skin, Bill," cried John suddenly. "I hear it popping and working all around, and it's beginning to move."

"In a minute. Wait till I dig out this far corner." His voice seemed to come from the bowels of the earth and had such an uncanny sound that John shivered.

"Hurry! Never mind the corner—it's going to fall. Come out, quick!" John's voice had such a note of fear and entreaty in it that the man below was impressed.

"All right," he said, "I'll come right along."

The boy stopped working and listened. There was a peculiar sliding sound that filled the air all about him, and from time to time a stone dropped to the floor with an echoing rattle.

"Come out." With an appalling roar the

great mass of coal came down. John was badly squeezed, his light was extinguished, and all the breath was knocked out of him, but he managed to work himself free and make his way to the room. His only thought was of Bill, under that heap of coal somewhere, and of the need of help.

He rushed along blindly through the solid darkness, his hands outstretched before him, shouting as he went, "Help, quick!"

Some men who were working in the entry answered him.

"What's up?" they asked.

"Help! Bill lies under a whole lot of coal."

They hurried to the coal face, and John showed them where he thought the imprisoned man lay, buried under tons of coal; the men, seizing picks, wedges, and sledges, began working frantically to rescue their comrade.

For half an hour they toiled as they never toiled before. Then there was a cry of horror. The body was found. The poor fellow's arms were raised in the very act of swinging his pick, and he evidently had had an instant and well-nigh painless death.

"Well, boys, I hope mine comes as easy as his," said old Mike McGuire, who had witnessed many a similar scene.

They took up the body gently and tenderly laid it in the car, the mule was unhitched, and the miners pushed it slowly to the open air, the whole force following.

On Sunday Bill's sorrowing comrades buried him. Mr. Worth read a few verses from the camp's only Bible, offered a short prayer, and the simple ceremony was over.

Of Bill Cooper, like many of the men of that time, little was known, and if any one should question as to his origin he would probably be answered with, "Came from the East, I guess." He had made many friends, but none felt his tragic death more than his young partner.

After this the work became irksome. John did not get along so well with his new partner, and often when he stopped to rest the sight came before his eyes of his dead friend as he lay under the black shroud of coal. Nevertheless, he toiled away faithfully, and seemed in a fair way of becoming an expert coal miner.

It was now well towards midwinter, and the boys began to long after some skating on the clear ice which had for some time covered the river completely. Alec was a handy blacksmith, and at their entreaties he set to work and fashioned them two pairs of rough but very serviceable skates. Since skating on the ice was some-

thing the boys had never learned, they had to get Yumping Yim, the Swede, to teach them how to use these new acquisitions. Though they were rude affairs, the boys, whose muscles were developed by snowshoeing, soon managed to make good headway on the river. In a sharp spin down the glassy surface after the day's work was over they could forget that their backs ached and their arms were heavy as lead. The brisk wind and change of exercise was like a tonic to them, and though the air-holes in the ice made night skating rather dangerous, it only added zest to their enjoyment.

As the boys skimmed past the Indian camp, which was a large one, they sometimes found a whole delegation of young savages out to watch their progress. The Indians had never seen skates before, and their wonder and interest were great. This camp, in turn, greatly interested the white boys; as they lay in bed they could hear the *bum-bum-bum-bum* of the medicine man's tom-tom come booming monotonously over the river. This sound continued so everlastingly every night that the boys' curiosity was aroused and they determined to see what the medicine man did besides making such a row.

After dark one night, they stole out and over to the red men's lodges, traced tht booming

noise, and finally, after great care and much dodging—for the Indian will not tolerate any spying on or interference with what he considers sacred—they reached the tepee from which the sound came; then they crept round to the opening flap and John cautiously thrust his head in, but quickly withdrew it.

"What's the matter?" whispered Ben.

"Old Crow Hat's facing this way. I was afraid he'd see us," John answered. "Let's look under this side."

Suiting the action to the word, the boys lifted the side of the tent-like lodge and gazed at the old medicine man. He was seated before the fire, his tom-tom between his knees, his head bowed low, and his long hair hanging over his face (an uncommon condition, for the red men generally keep their hair most neatly parted). Crow Hat swayed to and fro in time with the slow beating of his drum, and as he swung he chanted, "*Eeyuh! Eeyuh! Eeyuh!*" raising and lowering his voice as the tom-tom was beaten loudly or softly. Long the boys watched him, fascinated by the weird sound. Suddenly he began to thump his drum furiously and his voice rose from a low half-grunt to a shriek. The "*Eeyuh! Eeyuh!*" was now like the wail of a fierce wind.

This was too much for the boys' strained nerves. They backed away hurriedly and made for home, and it was some time before the sound of that last frenzied cry died out of their ears.

Bill Cooper's end had a great effect on John, and he was glad of the first opportunity to get out of the black hole and into the open air. Indeed, both boys welcomed the work of cutting and hauling props for the mine, which fell to them soon after their night visit to the Indians.

The elder was busily working unloading props at the mine entrance one day when Ben came down to him excitedly: "Say, John," he cried, "a squaw just came down from the big flat and she says she saw some buffalo over beyond the camp. The Indians over the creek are saddling up to go for them. Can't we go?"

"I don't know," said John, excited in turn. "You'll have to ask father. Go on up and see him while I finish this job."

The youngster went off on the run, and in a moment returned. One look at his face was sufficient to show John that he had the desired permission.

The mules were unhitched and turned out for the day. Baldy and Ben's horse were quickly saddled, rifles, belts, and cartridges were slung on, and in a twinkling the two young hunters

were off after the biggest game the country afforded.

When they got to the camp they found that most of the bucks had already started, but old "Wolf Voice," a minor chief with whom the boys had made friends, still remained.

"There's Wolf Voice; he'll let us go with him," said John. "Hello, can we go with you?" he shouted to the old man.

"You got good horse? Me go quick," grunted the brave.

"I guess we'll keep up," and Baldy danced as if to show his mettle. In a few minutes they were on their way up the slope to the plateau which surrounded the camping place. Baldy kept up easily with the Indian's pony and Wolf Voice turned after they had covered a mile at a round pace. "Heap good horse," said he.

"Yes," replied John. "He can beat anything around here in a half-mile run. Want to try now?"

The temptation was great, for the pony the chief rode was his best, but the thought of the chase restrained him. "Plenty ride soon," he said.

The level reached, the boys found that the great shaggy beasts were already surrounded, so they took a place in the circle and waited impatiently for a chance at the game.

With a yell the Indians rode towards the dazed animals, who now separated and began to run frantically in all directions. The party of hunters, of whom there were about twenty-five, also split up into little groups, and each party chased a buffalo. One of the animals came towards the boys.

"Get out of his way," yelled John to his brother, "and let him pass between us. Then fire as he goes."

The great lumbering beast came nearer and nearer, and as they watched, ready to spring away in case he should charge them, they noticed that he was being followed far off by an Indian.

"Now shoot," shouted John, as the quarry rushed by. Both rifles rang out, but the buffalo passed on without showing a sign of being hit. Immediately Ben's horse bolted with him, but Baldy stood his ground till his rider urged him after the fleeing game. John held his rifle ready to make a safe shot when opportunity offered. The horse was now gaining rapidly, but hearing the thump of hoofs behind him and then an Indian yelling, he turned his head and saw that Big Hawk, a young brave, was shouting something. He could not hear what it was, however, and paid no attention.

The race continued, and John's whole thoughts

was to get in a good shot. *Zip!* it was the unmistakable sound of a bullet, and as the boy turned to see from whence it came, *zip!* another bullet went humming by: the Indian was firing from behind, and the shots were coming unpleasantly close. John drew Baldy to one side just in time to get out of the pathway of another leaden pellet.

This last shot caught the buffalo in the leg, and he lunged forward on his massive head. Big Hawk then rode up and riddled him with bullets.

John was angry clear through.

"The coward," he muttered. "Might have hit me—'twasn't his fault he didn't either. Anybody could do up a buffalo from behind. 'Fraid I'd get him, I guess. See that?" he added as Ben came up.

Ben was indignant too, and both boys went up to where the young buck was skinning the scarcely dead beast, determined to have their share. The Indian protested against sharing the game, but Wolf Voice happened to come up at this moment, and, with the authority of a chief, soon settled the dispute by giving the boys a fine hind quarter. This they lashed securely with a lariat on Ben's horse. Then both rode off triumphantly on Baldy.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOSE FINISH.

"Boys, you'll have to go and hunt those spare mules to-morrow; they haven't been seen for a week." Thus Mr. Worth greeted the boys as they came shuffling in after a long day of mingled work and play one evening not long after the buffalo hunt.

The following morning the youngsters mounted their horses, after completing their early chores, and started out. "Where shall we go?" asked Ben.

"Let's look among the Indians' ponies; those mules are always following their cayuses around." The plan was no sooner made than executed. They trotted along the edge of the river for several miles, the crisp morning air acting like a tonic on horse and rider. Baldy was too old and dignified to be foolish, but his springy stride, wide-awake look, and quick response to each word of urging betokened his good condi-

tion and enjoyment. Ben's horse, a little bunchy cow pony with an occasional wicked streak in him, danced about as if he were worked by electricity and the current was being turned on and off.

The ford reached, the ponies waded in till the boys had to cross their legs in front of the saddles to keep from getting wet.

On the other side they found a bunch of a couple of hundred horses, and as they drew near the herders came charging down on them. They feared horse thieves, but John explained matters, and after a long sign-language talk learned that there were six of the long-eared runaways tied at the camp. They had been put there for safe keeping, since they had been killing colts and were in danger of being roughly used by the horses in consequence. A grown "pony," though generally smaller, will drive out a mule in short order, and these plucky little animals are never afraid to tackle their vicious antagonists.

The boys went back on the opposite side of the river from which they had come until the camp was reached.

They found the Indian village all agog with excitement, and for a time could not get any of the braves to answer their inquiries about the missing mules. A horse race was to be held, and

the usually stoical bucks could for the time being think of nothing else.

The whereabouts of the missing animals was learned before long, however, and an Indian went with them to see that they really belonged to the Worth outfit. On their way they had to pass straight through the village of several hundred tepees, and many were the greetings of "How!" that were shouted to them.

On the outskirts of the camp many braves were standing around, making bets, grooming their horses, and comparing notes. Little redskins darted everywhere in and out between their elders' legs and shouted shrilly to each other. The boys found it hard to go on to attend to their errand, and though neither said anything for a while, they looked appealingly at each other. "If we find the mules belong to us," said John, finally, in answer to Ben's questioning look, "we'll take 'em part way back, tie 'em, and then come here and see the races." So they went on reluctantly, leaving the gesticulating, grunting crowd behind them.

The captive animals were, as they hoped, the ones they had been seeking, and if the guide had any doubts of their ownership the big W branded on the shoulder of each beast soon dispelled them. "Lucky there's a fort near by,"

said John. "We'd never have seen those critters again if there hadn't been." The mules were driven back to a point convenient of access on the trip back to the mine and tied securely. Then both boys rushed over to the course as fast as their ponies could go.

Nothing had changed; the men still talked excitedly, and on either side of the level space where the horses were to run lay little heaps of personal belongings that had been bet on this or that horse—saddles, blankets, gay bead-embroidered moccasins, and belts, rifles, and cartridges.

As the boys drew near, old Wolf Voice started toward them with greater speed than befitted a chief of his dignity and years.

"You got white-faced horse?" he shouted as he came near. "You run race? Me bet you now, me beat you." The grave old buck was almost childish at the prospect of racing a running horse.

Before answering, John looked over the horses that were to compete, and then consulted with his brother. "What do you think?" said he. "Wolf Voice is crazy for a race, and I think Baldy can beat anything here."

"But we haven't any money," said Ben.

"Me bet you pony, you bet um pony," said the Indian, coming up at this instant and speaking as if in answer to Ben's remark.

John would not put up Baldy as a stake for anything in the world, but he took off his saddle. "I'll bet saddle against your ponies," he said, pointing to two horses a boy was leading forward. The old brave demanded more, so John added bridle and silver-mounted bit to the pile; still he was not satisfied, but John refused to give anything more. Wolf Voice haggled and demanded larger stakes on the boy's part and finally pointed to his spurs; these were unbuckled and thrown on the ground, and at last the bargain was completed.

At this juncture Big Hawk joined the group. He was eager to bet against Baldy, but all John's possessions were already pledged. It was a trying situation for the boy, for he wanted to get even with him, and he felt sure that his horse would win. A happy thought struck him.

"Say, Ben," he called out. "Lend me your saddle to put up against Big Hawk's pony. I haven't got anything left." The younger boy was also eager to pay back the young brave for his work at the buffalo hunt, so he complied with this request unhesitatingly.

The wagers arranged, John looked to his horse. Baldy was now without saddle or bridle, but his owner speedily made a *hackamore* or halter out

of a piece of rope and climbed on his back; he had decided to ride bare-back.

A number of braves were clearing the course for the racers, who had already lined up at the starting point, but old Wolf Voice rushed down and asked them to wait a minute for the new entry. In the meantime John was trotting up and down, warming up his mount. In a few minutes Baldy was in his place with the others. The horses all knew what was to be done, but Baldy did not become excited and tire himself as did some of the others.

They all lined up a hundred feet from the starting place. The course, which was merely a level, grassy place, stretched out invitingly before them; the Indian spectators formed the boundaries on either side, their usually impassive, dark-red faces working with excitement. At a word from the starter the horses went forward at a trot, then changed to a lope, and were breaking into a run when, a few yards from the scratch, the boy riding Wolf Voice's bay shot out of the line and ahead. Of course they had to be called back, and the boy was sharply reprimanded for spoiling the start.

Then again the horses started and came down to the scratch steadily. At the starter's yell of approval, they sprang ahead with a dash.

After the jolting scramble of the start, John began to plan his race. He pulled his horse out of the bunch and ran on the outside. Baldy and he were about the middle of the string as the fast ones led away. The little bay, which was the old chief's pride, led, running beautifully; at his heels was a big gray, fully holding his own. The distance of half a mile was more than half covered and both bay and gray were ahead of Baldy, who was third and well in advance of the bunch. The crowd was yelling wildly, each man shouting encouragement to his favorite in a way that would make an Eastern baseball "rooter" turn pale with envy.

John lay down closer upon his horse's neck and chirped gently in his ear. There was a perfect understanding between them, and the old steed stretched out his neck a little more, laid his ears hard against the side of his head, and set out to overhaul the leaders, now running nose and nose. Baldy's long stride told, and he gained steadily, but the race was not yet over. If he could get abreast of the two leaders John knew that he could win out on a twenty-foot spurt if need be—he had done it before.

It was but fifty yards from the finish. The two Indian ponies were tiring, but they kept up the pace gamely. The crowd was yelling in-

sanely, uttering threats, encouragements, entreaties in the Indian dialect, which neither John nor Baldy understood; but just at the critical moment a clear, shrill voice rose above the din: "Now, Baldy, hit it up! Get a move on, John!"

Horse and rider braced. John set his lips tighter: they were gaining, gaining perceptibly each second. The two leaders were whipping their ponies spasmodically, but John and Baldy kept their heads. Now Baldy's nose was on a line with the gray's hind quarter, now even with his shoulder, and now all three horses were running as if harnessed in one team. And still he gained. John was becoming excited and raised his quirt. "Come, Baldy, do it!" he cried, and at the same moment brought down the lash on him. The game old horse responded magnificently. A few great jumps and they gained three-quarters of a length. Another instant and they dashed past the finish line. Baldy had won!

John slipped from his back and patted his nose affectionately. "Good work, old chap. I knew you could leave that lot of cayuses behind."

"Hurrah for you, John!" cried Ben as the victors drew near. "Baldy, you're a trump, sure enough."

The boys were soon the centre of a circle of

red faces, excited, threatening, joyful, or merely interested, according to their bets. All were anxious to race again, but John refused. Realizing that he and Ben would be expected home, he broke through the ring, put his saddle and bridle on one of the horses he had won from Wolf Voice, mounted, and started off, leading the other two and Baldy. Ben managed as best he could with the mules, and so they returned to the mine, the richer by three ponies, several trinkets, moccasins, etc. It was not till a good deal later in life that the boys learned how much better worth while it is to race merely for the sake of the sport itself, and what a surprising amount of trouble a man can bring on himself and other people by forming a habit of betting. At present they unthinkingly followed the examples of the rough men around them.

In the year and a half that was spent at this mine on the Yellowstone many opportunities were offered for Baldy to show his speed, but the redskins had learned caution and were never again so reckless as on this memorable occasion.

The friendly feeling between the red and the white boys grew as time went on, and many excursions were taken in company. The Indians told John and Ben things about birds and beasts of which they never dreamed, and showed them

games that were a constant delight. They made a kind of combination spear and skate from the curved rib of a buffalo to the end of which were fastened three feathers; the highly polished convex surface offered little resistance to the ice, so the whole could be thrown a long distance on the glassy surface. The Worth boys grew to be very expert throwers of this queer bone skate, and many were the exciting matches they participated in.

Our boys in turn taught their coppery friends some civilized games. Trials of strength and skill were frequent, and in most of them the honors were about even. While the red boys could give points on the art of wrestling, and never lost an opportunity to show their superiority, the Worth youngsters got even by initiating them in the "noble art of self-defence." John put in practice the points given him by Tom Malloy, much to the discomfiture of the Indian boys and the corresponding satisfaction of his teacher and the men of the mining camp.

The new sport did not become popular, however, in the redskins' camp; John was too successful—his opponent was invariably worsted.

And so the days passed, with more work and less play, perhaps, than most boys are accustomed to. Many pleasant evenings, after the day's work

was done, were spent by the men telling yarns. John and Ben slipped out often, joined the group, and listened eagerly to the tales that were told. It was on one of these nights that Charley Green told a tale that entirely eclipsed Munchausen; a tale that would never have occurred to a Westerner.

"You know Big Hawk?" he began, looking at the men around him and then out of the corner of his eye at John. "Well, Big Hawk has seen the boys, and especially John, box, and made up his mind that he could do something in that line himself—at least that is my idea of his method of reasoning." He interrupted himself to explain: "He challenged John something in this fashion, 'You heap big fighter,' he said, 'me show you.'"

The men in the circle began to grin; they were beginning to take in the joke. John and his brother gazed in amazement; all this was new to them.

"Though he is a pretty big chap," Green continued, "the kid didn't seem to be scared; he knew how to put up his hands and the big red duffer was entirely ignorant of fistic tactics. Anyhow the boy called the bluff by responding, 'Well, I don't know, I reckon I can do you up.' Ben was sent for the gloves, those primitive,

deerskin-stuffed-with-grass affairs. A space was cleared on the dry grassy river bottom, and the spectators marked the boundaries. The spectators were mostly red," added Green.

"Produce a spectator," shouted a listener.

"Proof, proof, we want proof of this."

"Never mind him," exclaimed another; "go on, Charley."

"I'm not making affidavits. I'm simply telling a story," Charley explained. "Big Hawk, knowing it to be a kind of battle, had arrayed himself in full war regalia, which consisted chiefly of a big, feathered bonnet and a decorative effect in yellow, red, and green paint."

The group of interested listeners chuckled, but offered no remarks or objections. John and Ben appeared to be dazed.

"Tom Malloy was the referee, and I acted as John's second. Wolf Voice did the same service for Big Hawk.

"When the two stepped into the ring," Green continued, "the tall, paint-decorated, feather-tufted Indian and the short, pink-skinned boy, a smile appeared on the usually grave-faced red men. I said to myself, Is this a Punch and Judy show or a scene from the Inferno come to the surface? 'Time!' sang out Tom Malloy, watch in hand."

Green stopped to take breath, then continued:

"The two stepped to the centre, and the red man decided to settle matters at once. A strong right-arm jab followed. John dodged, and the force of the blow nearly jerked the Indian off his feet, and at the same time pulled the war bonnet over his eyes. The boy took advantage of this and thumped Big Hawk on the chest. The Indian cleared his eyes and came at him like a wounded buffalo, head down, hands going like flails; avoiding them, John hit out for the nose and landed square on his beak. The buck tripped and fell on his back and the blood began to flow freely from the bruised member, mingling with the yellow and green paint, forming a very weird design. It was enough, Big Hawk was satisfied and hastened to get off the gloves and bathe his nose at the river's edge."

From time to time during the recital of this tale Green glanced at the boys to see the effect of his absurd story. That they were greatly amused was evident. Cries of "Come off!" "What are you giving us?" and the like followed the conclusion, and Charley Green subsided, congratulating himself on his vivid imagination.

The feeling between the two camps, or rather the younger members of them, was not always friendly, and the boys were glad when their

MR. WORTH HAD BUILT FOR HIMSELF A NEW HOUSE. (*Page* 157.)

THE SHEEP RANCH HOUSE. (*Page* 137.)

father came back after opening a new mine, told them that he had bought a sheep ranch, and asked them if they wanted to go to work on it. The brothers accepted eagerly, for they were possessed with the restless spirit of the Westerner and were anxious for new scenes and new experiences.

Much had transpired during the long stay at the Yellowstone mine. The railroad, with its busy construction gang and its noisy, short-breathed engine, had reached and passed the little camp and had left behind its steel trail. The tracks were not used for regular traffic as yet, but the little dinky engine went by frequently, dragging flat cars loaded with rails, ties, and other construction material. The boys became great friends of the engineer, and he allowed them to ride with him in the cab of the locomotive occasionally.

It was with real regret, therefore, that one

War-dance postures.

morning, as the iron horse stood near the mine, hissing and grunting in impatience to be off, the boys climbed up the step and into the cab to bid their friend Mr. Jackson good-by.

"What! going to pull up stakes?" he inquired. "I've got three boys about your size back in the East at school, where you ought to be," he added.

"Well," John replied, "mother has talked about school, but father says he's going to teach us to work first."

"Father's great on work," interposed Ben.

In answer to Mr. Jackson's inquiry, John said that they were to start in a day or two and would go alone, driving a buckboard; and that though they did not know the road the horses had been over it, so with that aid and the description given they would be able to find the way.

"Well, so long, boys," said the kindly engineer, after they had shaken hands and thanked him for the many engine rides, "I shall miss you."

"Same here; so long!" called Ben and John in chorus.

The little engine began to cough, the steam puffed and hissed, and in a few minutes it was out of sight around the turn.

A day or two later the boys climbed into the buckboard, and, after bidding a matter-of-fact

farewell to all, started off: on a journey to a place neither of them had been to before, over a road that was entirely unfamiliar to both.

With their father's last instructions ringing in their ears, they set out at a good pace.

The hundred-and-fifty-mile drive lasted five long, wearisome days. Day after day they travelled, sitting still on the bouncing, rattling buckboard. The white-topped wagons that came into view occasionally were hailed with relief, for they somewhat broke the monotony of the journey; a word or two with these drivers and a question as to the location of the best grass, wood, and water—camp necessaries—was all that passed, but even that was a comfort after the desolation and loneliness through which they had been passing.

On the fourth day the Big Horn River came into view and was crossed in safety. The appearance of the country changed, and the boys for the first time saw real mountains. Living, as they had been, on the flat prairies, their surprise was as great as their interest and delight at these massive hills uprearing themselves against the sky. The day following they drove up to the door of the ranch house and were received cordially by Abe Miller, the foreman in charge. In obedience to their father's command they de-

livered a letter of instructions, and while Abe was painfully studying this out, his hardened forefinger pointing to each word as he went along, the boys had ample time to observe him as well as their new surroundings. They saw that he was short and rather fat and blessed with the face that is apt to go with that build: it was decidedly cheerful, for the corners of his mouth turned up; even now there was a half smile on his lips, though his brow bore a perplexed frown from his literary struggle. The ranch buildings, which consisted of half a dozen rough sheds and as many more corrals, beside the ranch house or log shack, lay in a valley. On one side rose a high range of mountains, wooded to the summit; on the other, a long, rolling, grass-covered plain.

"I don't see any sheep," said John, after scanning the country in every direction.

Abe looked up, but held his stubby forefinger pressed firmly on the last word he was deciphering, as if to make sure of its safety.

"Oh, they're twenty-five miles down the creek now," he answered. "We only keep them here in the winter. We'll go there to-morrow; it's too late now."

By the time the ranchman had finished the letter the sun was nearing the mountain crest and the boys' appetites assured them it was time to

eat. In the shack a low fire was burning, which blazed cheerfully when John added an armful of dry twigs and brush. While the boy was mending the fire, Abe went to one corner of the cabin and from a tall pole which stood there let down part of a sheep's quarter.

"Why do you keep it up there?" asked Ben, who now noticed it for the first time.

"No flies up there," explained Abe. "Meat keeps in this climate till it dries up if the flies don't get at it."

The boys went out and sat on the door-step to wait till the meal was cooked, for though they were more tired than they realized, they had the greatest curiosity to see everything connected with this new home.

After sitting silent a while, their heads resting on the door-jamb, their eyes on the crest of the mountain where the sun shone with its last departing glory, John turned toward his brother.

"Those mountains are great. We didn't have— Say, Mr. Miller, what's this?" he asked excitedly, interrupting himself and pointing, first to some bullet-holes in the logs and then at a blood stain on the block below.

CHAPTER IX.

A "BAD MAN'S" END.

"That's where Mexican Jack was killed," answered Abe, coming in the doorway, frying pan in hand. "He was shot just where you sit. I'll tell you about it after supper."

John moved away from the spot.

Before long the ranchman called them in, and they enjoyed a supper the like of which had not fallen to their lot since they left the mine. The compliment the boys paid Abe's cooking did much to win his heart. Though they were anxiously waiting to hear the story of the bullet holes and the spot of blood, Abe continued to talk about gravies, the advantages of a very hot pan in cooking, and other culinary topics that would have interested John at another time, for he rather prided himself on his ability as cook, but which now seemed more than trivial.

The boys lent a hand, and soon the tins were washed and the heavy deal table cleared. The fire replenished, and Abe's pipe fairly started, all three drew their stools up to the blaze.

"Well, how about Mexican Jack?" ventured Ben at last, unable to restrain his curiosity longer.

"Oh, yes, I was going to tell you about that, wasn't I? Well, he was a hard case," continued the speaker. "Half Mexican, half white man—and all bad, he was. I made his acquaintance about ten years ago at Boisé City, and the first thing I heard of him was that he'd just killed a gambler—gambler was a hard case, so nobody cared much—and Jack skipped. Shortly after that he went to Denver and bullied the town. Oh, he was a regular 'bad man.' You know what a 'bad man' is, don't you?"

"Sure," said John. "Tough customer who knows he's tough and takes pride in it. They're always mighty quick with their guns, and dead shots. One of 'em shot a man in the arm, near our shack back in Bismarck, and mother tied it up. It was queer; the bullet went right through and it looked like a rose where it came out."

"Well," continued Abe, "Jack was a 'bad man,' and he didn't care who knew it. He had a shooting scrape in Denver and had to jump the

town in pretty lively style. The sheriff's posse got after him, but he killed two of 'em and got off. After that every sheriff in the country was looking for him, so he turned outlaw and road agent near Virginia City, and held up Ben Halliday's stages till the vigilance committee hung some of his partners and got too hot on his trail. Not a thing more did I hear of him till he turned up about two years ago with this bunch of sheep of your father's. He had turned herder and driven 'em all the way in from Utah." Miller stopped to relight his pipe, for he had forgotten to keep it going in the interest of his tale. The boys were impatient at the least delay; the ruddy firelight lit up their faces and showed their eager interest.

"Your father had bought this ranch and put me in charge just a little while before Mexican Jack came along; I spotted him at once and he spotted me, but I didn't let on, for I knew he was all-fired quick with his gun and I wasn't looking for trouble. Of course he never went to town: it wasn't healthy for him there; and if he wanted anything he had to wait till somebody who was going in would get it for him. Even with such care, though, he knew it wasn't safe for him to stay in one place very long, so one day in spring he told me he was going to quit and move on.

Don't you boys ever turn 'bad men,'" said Abe, with a laugh; "it don't pay. Brave as that poor chap was, he was fairly afraid of his shadow when he got to thinking of sheriffs' posses. One man isn't much good against the law, even out here. Well," he went on, "I went to town to get another man—it's thirty miles, so I stayed over night. Charley Boyd, who runs a liquor joint there, told me a young feller, an Englishman, he thought, had been in there several times asking about sheep. Charley said there might be some business in it, so I dropped in later.

"Boyd went up to a young chap who was sitting watching a faro game. 'Here's your man, Mr. Simmons,' said he. The stranger wanted to know all about the different bunches of sheep near there, so I told him and talked a good deal about one thing or another having to do with them. I remember I told him I was looking for a herder to take the place of a Mexican that was going to quit. Soon after that he left. I could not quite make him out, but it was plain enough he wasn't buying."

"What's all this got to do with Mexican Jack?" inquired Ben, who didn't see the drift of the narrative.

"If you wait a minute, I'll tell you." Abe was vexed at the thoughtless interruption, and

Ben subsided, realizing that he had been rather foolish. "In the morning I packed my stuff on the led horse, mounted my own cayuse, and started out. I had just topped the rise near the shack when a bullet went by with a hum, and then another and another, so I chased back for cover to the other side. I dismounted, crawled up to the top, and looked over. There at the door sat Mexican Jack, six-shooter in hand. I couldn't understand why in the world he should shoot at me, so I rode over to look up Billy, the other herder, and find out what was up. He hadn't been to the shack since morning and knew nothing about it, so he left the sheep and we went down the coulie, which runs just below here, you know, till we got behind that clump of brush —perhaps you saw it. We peeked through pretty cautious, I can tell you. The Mexican was still there, but his body was all hunched up; he seemed drunk or asleep, for his six-shooter lay on the ground by his side.

"We covered him with our guns, for he was chained lightning with his shooting irons, and then yelled at him. He didn't answer or move an inch. We jumped out then, still keeping him covered, and walked slowly up, ready to riddle him if he should make a move with that deadly pistol hand of his. Once he quivered a bit and

his right hand stirred toward his gun. I almost plunked him then, I was so nervous, but there was no other sign of wakefulness or life. We decided he must have gotten hold of some liquor somewhere, but when we got within about fifty feet of him Billy noticed a pool of blood at his side. Then we rushed forward—guns still ready, however—and just as we reached the steps he lurched forward and fell full on his face—dead!

"A couple of bullets had gone clean through him. We found out when we turned his body over to the authorities in town that Simmons, the young Englishman I had met, had come over to America a year before expressly to kill Mexican Jack, who had shot his brother in some quarrel. I had supplied the missing link of information, and he had gone early in the morning to our shack, where he had shot the Mexican twice. Jack evidently thought I had given him away purposely and tried to settle me."

"My! what a fiend," said John. "But what became of Simmons?"

"Oh, he went back to town and gave himself up, was tried, and acquitted; for no jury out here would convict such a man for shooting a bad lot like Mexican Jack."

"I should think you'd be glad to get rid of

him," exclaimed both boys in chorus. "Weren't you afraid to have him round so long?"

"Oh, no; he wouldn't trouble me, I guess, as long as I let him alone; he was a blamed good herder, and it was worth while to keep on the right side of him. Now, you boys want to tumble in, for we'll be going out right early in the morning to the range."

The twenty-five-mile trip next day to the range where the sheep were grazing was made without incident, but the country was all new to the boys and they plied their guide with questions. They learned that Abe Miller was to stay with them on the range and teach them their duties, another man taking charge at the ranch house during his absence.

It was expected that Mr. and Mrs. Worth would move to the new mine (about fifteen miles from the ranch house) in a couple of months.

Their education as herders completed, the boys would be given sole charge of a large bunch of several thousand sheep. A kind of shed, open in front and built of round, chinked logs, entirely lacking in comforts of every kind, was to be their home. Polly, Dick, and Pete, the three sheep dogs, and the great flock of woolly animals would then be their only companions.

Abe initiated them at once into the routine of

their new occupation and introduced them to "Polly" and her two sons, Dick and Pete, the ever-vigilant, intelligent dogs who were to be their capable assistants.

It was hardly the work that an enterprising, wide-awake, active person, young or old, would choose. Untiring vigilance was the one thing necessary. Watchfulness never ceasing, day and night, rain and shine, was the chief occupation of the sheep herder. Polly, the dog, was a much better herder than her young masters at first, and Dick and Pete were not far behind. They moved the "bunch" to fresh feeding grounds at the command, and fully understood the wig-wag code of the plains. When driving at a distance from camp Polly would trot to a hill top and watch for the boys' signal: if John waved horizontally she would drive them farther, Dick and Pete assisting; when the bunch had been driven far enough John's hat would be flapped up and down, and the dogs, with almost human intelligence, would at once stop their charges.

The attacks of coyotes, wolves, and, more rarely, mountain lions were the greatest danger to the sheep that the young shepherds had to guard against. Some of these four-footed enemies were almost always prowling about, looking hungrily for a chance at a stray sheep or lamb.

A coyote or wolf among an unprotected flock will destroy a surprising number of sheep in a few minutes, seemingly for the pure love of killing, so there was good reason for the sharpest kind of lookout.

After the novelty of the life wore off, the boys began to wish themselves back at the mine. For weeks at a time they did not see another human being. Each day was like every other day; in the morning the rope corral enclosing the flock was let down, and the sheep were driven by the dogs to a place where the feed was good; then the boys mounted their horses and followed to the grazing ground. During the two mid hours of the day the animals rested, lying down quietly, and the brothers would take advantage of this time to get in as much sport as the spot afforded. Rifles were always slung on the saddle, and the slinking coyotes gave plenty of opportunity to show good marksmanship. Occasionally the curiously marked antelope appeared, looking, as Charley Green once said, "as if some one had started to paint the whole lot tan but had got tired of the job and left patches of white at odd places"; then the young hunters would set out, and in the excitement of a hunt forget for a time the monotony of the life. Seldom was it safe for both to go at once; only at noon, when the sheep

were lying down in open, level country, could the dogs be left wholly in charge.

Towards evening the bunch must be corraled for the night—a difficult task if there are many lambs in the flock. The boys found, often to their disgust, that a lamb can run like a deer when it gets thoroughly frightened. It was shortly after Abe had left them that, in accordance with his teaching, they began to "round up" the flock preparatory to stretching the rope corral. Ben was on one side with Polly and Dick, John on the other with Pete; all was going well, and John and Pete, neither very experienced in the business in hand, began to feel the pride that goeth before a fall. Suddenly the sheep fifty yards from where John stood began to scatter. Pete was sent forthwith to force them back, and while he was busy there a lamb, long and clumsy of leg, apparently not strong enough to stand alone, started out on a voyage of discovery not ten yards from the boy. It would not do to let it stray far, for a coyote would make short work of it, so John sped off in pursuit.

As he drew near the little woolly thing it increased its speed, running as you would imagine a rickety table would run, but it kept going faster and faster. John, who unfortunately was on foot, found to his mortification that he could not

overtake it. It looked as if he would have to give up the chase. At last, however, he tried gradually turning to one side and heading it back to the bunch; even then it might have got away if Polly, taking in the situation, had not flown to the rescue. John came back panting, hot, and tired, only to find Ben sitting calmly in his saddle with a broad grin on his countenance. Even the dogs seemed to be laughing, their open mouths and lolling tongues giving their faces a look of keen enjoyment over his discomfiture.

Even after the flock was safely corralled it required almost as much watching as if in the open. The boys usually took turns, each watching half the night. A fire was built on one side of the enclosure, and the watcher lay on the other. The sheep, probably the most helpless animals one could find, lay right up against each other, their closely packed bodies looking at night like a patch of snow.

As the young herder fought with himself to keep awake, the howl of a coyote often broke the stillness; then he must start up, gun in hand, and make a round of the flock. From time to time he replenished the fire and made a careful scrutiny of the country round in search of the lurking enemies of his charges. Till he woke his brother about midnight there was hardly a minute's rest

Then Ben took up the vigil, while John slept till daylight; and so began another weary day exactly like the preceding one.

While in summer sheep are docile and amiable, though never so interesting as are cattle, horses, or mules, in winter they become stupid, intractable, and aggravating to the herder. It was in the winter that the boys' greatest hardships were encountered, for they found it necessary more than once literally to carry some of the flock through snow drifts to the ranch. They would not be driven or led, but when a trail had been made, and a number carried and forced along it, the remainder would pluck up courage to follow through the bank of snow.

The boys spent all one summer and winter with the sheep. From time to time Mr. Worth, who had moved his entire outfit over to the new mine, came out to the range to inspect the animals; and towards the end of the year the boys each time besought their father to let them go back with him. For the first time they realized the meaning of an expression they had often heard: "as crazy as a sheep herder." The shepherd's life in the far West is as uninteresting, ambitionless, and lonely an existence as falls to the lot of man. For long periods of time a shepherd is so entirely alone with his flock and his dogs

that the experience not infrequently costs him his reason. It was a terribly lonely life for youngsters such as they; though each was company for the other, they both longed to hear the home sounds and see the familiar faces. Mr. Worth, however, would not consent to their return till the year was up. He felt that the discipline was good for them, and besides he was never willing to have them let go of anything without finishing it.

The new mine was the most important and largest that had been opened. It was situated on the line of the railroad that had just been constructed, and was of a more permanent character than the preceding ones. Many of the miners brought their wives and families with them, so that they formed quite a settlement. Occasionally the miners' sons would ride out to visit the Worth boys, who were delighted to see them, though there was little in common between them. The miners were Easterners, as a rule, and knew nothing of horsemanship, hunting, or plainscraft; but they were boys and were gladly received as such. They regaled John and Ben with accounts of the happenings at the mine, but while they listened eagerly, this only added to their impatience to return and made them more discontented with their present life.

When the snow began to melt and the grass to grow green again, the brothers occupied most of their time in thinking what they would do when they got back to civilization, for the time of their release was drawing near.

"I'd go crazy if I had to stay here with these woolly idiots another year," said John one day.

"Yes," returned Ben, "it's about as tame as anything could be. But what are we going to do when we get back? You can bet your bottom dollar father won't let us sit round and enjoy the view."

"I suppose we'll have to get to work at something." John stroked Polly's head reflectively as he spoke, and the good dog, undemonstrative always, showed her pleasure only by the slow wagging of her bushy tail.

"But what?" It was Ben who spoke. "I'll be switched if I want to go to coal mining, and I guess you don't care about it either."

"That's right," replied John, laconically. "I've had enough of mining to last me a lifetime." He shivered a little at the remembrance of his experience.

For a time both were silent; each was trying to think of something he might turn his hand to that would suit his father and at the same time please himself. It was not an altogether cheer-

ful prospect that lay before them. They would soon change the solitude for their bustling, busy home. It was home, and that was good to think of. Yet it was a home where a boy's love of fun and his healthy animal spirits were not considered: his capacity for work was what counted. A home where uncongenial, hard labor awaited them unless they could think of some other occupation that would satisfy their stern, just, absolutely honest but unyielding father.

"Well?" said Ben at last.

"Well!" returned John in much the same tone, "there is one thing we might do—perhaps."

"Well?" said Ben again, eagerly.

"You remember when young Watson was over here the other night," John began. "He said that a mail route was to be run from Ragged Edge Camp to the railroad, through the pass in the mountain——"

"Yes, and he had the job. That shuts us out, doesn't it?"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed John, impatiently. "He's a tenderfoot, and he'll never in the world be able to make that trip on time, in winter—he'll never be able to make it at all. You'll see that after he has been late a few times we'll have a chance. Then I intend to apply for the job. See?"

John was the more aggressive, the stronger of the two, both in mind and body. The younger brother had learned to lean on his more independent spirit, so it was John who always had the deciding voice when there was a doubtful plan. Ben's yielding disposition enabled him to get along more comfortably with every one, and especially with the supreme authority in the household.

The Worth boys soon learned from their occasional visitors that they would be expected to show their prowess as boxers and wrestlers on their arrival in camp, so they determined to practise up. Every day at noon, when the sheep lay down, the two went at each other, good humoredly but with seriousness, advising one another when a mistake was made. Every blow, every trick, that Tom Malloy had taught John they tried till they knew it perfectly. Every feint, every fall, that the Indians practised they perfected, till by the time their term with the sheep was up their bodies were as supple and their muscles as strong as constant exercise and clean, healthy living in the open air could make them.

At last the new men arrived, the boys turned over the sheep to them, and promptly saddled up for their ride across the mountains. They were

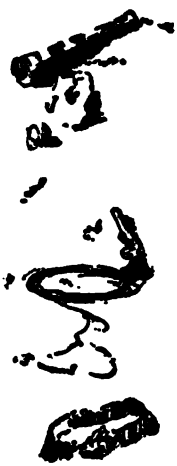
glad to get away from the ranch, but when they reviewed the passed long months and realized that they had not flinched, they experienced that peculiar pleasure that comes from carrying through a hard job.

CHAPTER X

BATTLE ROYAL.

Mr. Worth had built for himself a plank house with shingled roof—the first real house the boys had entered since they left Bismarck.

Their father was away when they arrived, to be gone for some weeks, so the boys had a chance to have some of the fun they had longed for. They expected to have great sport with the miners' sons, but were keenly disappointed to find that their tastes were utterly different. The latter were as a rule Eastern boys, and were versed in civilized amusements: baseball, marbles, tops, and all the games of skill and strength dear to the town dwellers. Of all these our boys knew nothing; their amusements were akin to their work—to ride well and shoot straight was a matter of business as well as pleasure for them. And so the Worth boys and those of the camp stood aloof from one another, and John and Ben were soon almost as unhappy as they had been on the sheep range.



They still hoped to have an opportunity to show their skill as wrestlers and fighters in the emphatic way that was the custom in that day and place, but for a long time the camp boys gave them no provocation. As time went on, however, the mining boys grew overbearing and insulting and never lost an opportunity to taunt and aggravate the young Westerners.

"I'm going to lick that Jake Adams within an inch of his life," said John, wrathfully, one day to his brother. "He's the worst one of the lot."

"All right," said Ben. "I'm with you."

Pretty soon an opportunity came, and John challenged Jake to fight. He accepted at once. A ring was formed on the outskirts of the camp by the boys and some of the men who guaranteed fair play. The contest that followed was short, sharp, and decisive. John kept his head and made every blow tell, while Jake in his anger forgot all he knew and defended himself so poorly that his opponent soon satisfied him he was the better man.

After this such contests, generally not quite so earnest, were frequent. From most of them John came out victorious, and for a time the others ceased to taunt the Worth boys. But the feeling was far from being as friendly as it ought to have been between the two factions. Even

the settlement of the arguments in so thorough a manner failed to clear the air entirely.

The miners admired pluck and skill, and John had many friends among them. His father, too, did not disapprove, for he also admired one who could give and take hard knocks. His approval was never outspoken, however; on the contrary he made John's bruises the subject of his chaffing. To John—who, in spite of his apparent indifference, was very sensitive and craved sympathy—this was almost unbearable.

As John predicted, young Watson failed to get the mails in on time. John at once offered to undertake the job, and after some questioning the authorities decided he was capable of accomplishing it. Here was something he could do that would test his intelligence, his strength, and his courage. It was work and amusement at the same time, and he accepted it gladly.

Ragged Edge had sprung up in a gulch fourteen miles from the coal camp. It was a new camp of the mushroom variety, called suddenly into being by the discovery of some gold-bearing gravel in the creek there. Deep snows on the range nearly cut off communication with the outer world for three months in the year. By following the high, wind-swept ridge, the mountain could be crossed by a venturesome horseman

till winter came on and the snows grew too deep, when snowshoes must be resorted to. Even late in the summer snowshoes were necessary to travel over the soft masses of the snow which always crowned the summit.

When John presented himself as a candidate for mail rider, Burns, the boss at Ragged Edge, looked at him in good-natured amusement. "Well, kid, if you think you can do it, go ahead and try. But it means work and p'raps danger." John told of his snowshoeing experiences in Dakota modestly but straightforwardly, and satisfied him by his resolute mien that he had the pluck to do it if any one could.

The boy spent several days in going over the ground, noting the best line to follow and making sure of his landmarks before the snows should cover up everything. He found at the top of the pass an old, abandoned cabin and marked its location in his mind in case of future necessity. This bit of precaution served him well before the winter was over.

"You had better get a good strong horse," said Mr. Worth, as John was mounting Baldy—for the trips had already begun. "Baldy's too old. You'll need a good young horse."

John said nothing for a minute, but patted his steed as if to express his confidence in him.

"Oh, no, sir. Baldy knows me and I know Baldy, and I think I can get along better with him than I could with any other horse," he said, rather anxiously, for he was afraid that his companion would be denied him. "Besides," he continued, "Baldy can smell a trail through two feet of snow, and isn't he in good condition? You can't see a rib."

"All right," returned his father. "He's yours, and the job's yours. Go ahead and work it out the way you think best."

So boy and horse encountered the perils of the mountain pass together, friends always, but now sole companions.

While there was no sign of snow in the valleys, it was falling steadily in the mountains. John did not carry out his first plan of tethering Baldy at the snow line on the mine side of the mountains and covering the rest of the distance on snowshoes. He found that by following the bare ridges he could go the whole distance on horseback. His route was changed almost every day, for the wind formed drifts in different places and blocked the old way ten feet deep over night. In certain places cuts in the ridge would become filled with snow, and through this horse and rider had to flounder till a hard trail had been packed. It was in such spots that Baldy's cleverness mani-

fested itself; he rarely missed the narrow, packed path, though it might be buried two feet or more. An incautious step to one side was sure to cause both horse and rider to disappear in the soft mass.

"Well, I must say you have done pretty well so far," said Burns one day, as John dismounted and handed him the packet of mail.

"Yes; haven't missed a trip," he answered rather proudly. "Don't know if I'd have made such a good record if I hadn't the best snow horse going though. Been snowshoeing it two weeks ago if it wasn't for Baldy." He stopped to stroke the animal's nose affectionately. "I vowed this should be his last trip, it's getting harder and harder; but he's such good company I hate to give him up."

Next morning, as Burns handed out the return mail, he warned the boy that bad weather was coming, and suggested that he leave the horse behind, for he would be more of a hindrance than a help. "Those black clouds mean that we're in for a big storm," he said, "and I tell you that you and your horse had better stay here. I can't boss you, kid, but I advise you not to fool with that storm—it's coming sure and you don't know what it means up here." In spite of this John decided to go on Baldy, for he wished to leave him safe at his father's camp.

The hard travelling had begun to tell on the sturdy little horse; his body was not so round as formerly, nor his step so springy, but he carried his young rider well for all that and was as knowing and careful as ever.

John tucked the package of precious letters in his saddle-bag, and after calling out a good-by to Burns he set out. He had barely reached high ground when snow began to fall heavily and with it came a blustering, roaring wind that buffeted the travellers roundly. The horse slackened his speed, and, by signs that John knew well, advised retreat. The boy urged him forward, however, saying aloud—for he always felt as if Baldy could understand everything he told him—"No, old man, if we go back now you'll have to winter in the Ragged Edge gulch and you'll die sure. We can make it all right." The good beast seemed to acquiesce in his master's judgment, for he went along without further hesitation. The trail now was covered almost knee deep, and the blinding mist and whirling flakes blotted out nearly all landmarks. They pushed forward, at one moment right in the teeth of the blast, at the next turning a sharp corner and running before it, heads down, eyes almost closed, the rider depending on the keen senses of his steed to find the way.

At length Baldy stopped, and John felt, with a thrill of real alarm, that he had lost the trail. To go forward seemed impossible, to go back almost as bad. To and fro they went, in vain efforts to find the way. Baldy still floundered along, his hoofs covered with gunny sacks to prevent their sharp edges from cutting through the crust; but his sides began to heave and his legs to shake under him, for the exertion of breaking through the drifts from one wind-swept ridge to another was most exhausting. John could stand it no longer; he slipped off his back and caught his head in both arms: "Why did I bring you out here?" he said, in bitter self-reproach. It was evident that if he did not find shelter soon his old friend would freeze to death.

There was one chance for himself: he was light and might be able to make his way over the snow to Ragged Edge Camp, perhaps; but what would then become of his faithful friend? Could he leave him to such a fate after he had so spent himself for his master's sake? Baldy stood knee deep in the cruel, treacherous, white snow, his head down, quick, spasmodic puffs coming from his nostrils, his body steaming, and his flanks all in a tremble. There was only one chance for the lives of both. John remembered the abandoned hut at the top of the pass—if they could possibly

reach that, they might be able to weather the storm together. He determined to try. Fastening Baldy's bridle rein to his fore leg, so that he could not follow, and giving him an affectionate pat on the nose, he started off, his teeth set determinedly. A few yards away the driving snow shut Baldy off from his sight entirely, but a gentle whinny reached him and brought a lump into his throat.

"That's all right, old boy," he called aloud; "I'm not going to leave you. I'll be back." He turned in the direction he thought the cabin should be and fought his way on. The wind seemed like a howling fiend; it tore at his clothing, blew the particles of snow into his eyes, and raised such a veil of mist and frost that he could not see ten yards ahead of him. On the high, bare ridges the blast nearly took him off his feet and in the hollows the snow banks engulfed him. Still he struggled on, straining his eyes forward into the gray chaos that confronted him, determined to find the shelter. A vision of Baldy standing dejectedly alone, his rough brown coat turned white by the sleet, his faithful old eyes half closed, drove the boy on irresistibly, for, next to his brother, he loved his horse better than anything else in the world.

He ploughed through drift after drift, follow-

ing one ridge, for only by keeping one such landmark in sight was it possible to go in any given direction. Would that haven of rest ever come into view? Even his stout heart began to despair; he was weary, his body bathed in sweat, yet his face, feet, and hands numb with cold; the elements seemed to conspire against him. He was only a boy, and it seemed hard that he should give up his life. He stood still and looked drearily down the hillside. Nothing, nothing but the deadly snow. He began to wonder if it was worth while to fight against such odds any longer.

And then in this abjectness he suddenly gave a cry of delight. For the wind rent the snow apart for an instant and he caught a glimpse through the driving flakes of a dead tree and near it a peculiarly shaped, great gray rock. They seemed positively human, like old friends, for the shelter he sought stood just to the left of them.

He began at once to look for a place where Baldy might be led down in safety. This was

impossible where he stood—it was far too steep and rocky. A detour made with infinite pains and exertion brought him to the cabin by a path that he thought the sure-footed beast might follow.

How John found his way to the half-frozen beast and then slowly got him back to the cabin he never knew. Only his indomitable pluck and his training pulled him through. But at last the terrible journey was safely accomplished, and boy and steed stood before the low door.

John took off the saddle, and the intelligent animal, bending his knees a little, squeezed through. The boy followed, throwing the saddle blanket over the horse's shivering flanks and wondering if they were safe, even now. At best it was a poor shelter; the wind blew the sharp, powdery snow through the chinks in the logs and kept the temperature almost as low within as without, but at least there was a roof and a wind break.

After a short rest, John scrambled up the slope to the dead tree and broke off some branches. The wood was still dry, except on the very outside, and made good kindling. Soon a fire was blazing, and boy and beast absorbed the heat gratefully. Only those who have suffered great and deadly cold can realize the delight of sitting

before a blaze once more. The very sight of the flames puts life into the veins and makes a mere nightmare of what was just now a grim and awful reality.

Thoroughly warmed, and with new courage and strength, John went outside again and began to stop up the chinks with snow and to scrape banks of it up against the walls. The heat from within melted the inner surface, which afterwards froze and prevented the wind from blowing it away.

All day John was kept busy gathering wood and patching the walls. By nightfall a good supply of fuel had been collected and the little cabin was by comparison comfortable. There was little sleep for the boy that night, however. The fury of the storm did not abate; the wind howled round their little refuge, shaking it so it seemed as if it would be impossible for it to withstand the blast.

All night long he listened to the roaring of the wind, taking "cat naps" during the short lulls that came at intervals. The fire required constant replenishment, and Baldy, unaccustomed to confinement in such a small space, was so restless that continual watchfulness was necessary to keep from under his feet, though the good horse would never have harmed his young master ex-

cept by accident. Both boy and beast began also to suffer greatly from hunger.

At dawn the gale subsided somewhat, and John realized that he must get food at once if his life and that of his horse were to be saved. Breaking through the snow bank which had piled up against the rude door, he made his way to a creek half a mile down the mountain and cut with his knife an armful of poplar saplings and carried them back to the hut. Baldy tore off the bark from these and munched it contentedly; another armful was added to the store, and then John bade his equine friend good-by and started off to find food and shelter for himself.

The six miles that separated the lonely cabin from the mining camp were the longest and most trying that John had ever travelled, he thought. Great drifts barred his way, the wind, still strong, blew in his face and seemed bent on his destruction, his empty stomach weakened him, and lack of sleep undermined his resolution.

From dawn till noon day he battled with the snow, and when at last he reached his father's house he was hardly able to answer the questions which his overjoyed family put to him.

A man was sent back to look after Baldy. He found that good horse chewing poplar bark as calmly as if he was in his own stable, though the

cabin was so small and the horse so large in comparison that it appeared to be resting on his back, like the howdah on an elephant. For several days Baldy was kept in the cabin and fed on hay, which had to be carried to him on foot; then, after considerable trouble, for a trail had to be stamped down much of the way, he was led back in triumph to the camp, where John, rather weak in the knees, greeted him joyfully.

For a week Ragged Edge Camp did not receive any mail. Late one afternoon John appeared on snowshoes, bearing the precious packet. He had to repeat his story many times, and Burns had the satisfaction of qualifying his admiration of the boy's pluck with an emphatic "I told you so."

John continued to carry the mail between Ragged Edge Camp and the railroad every three or four days: at first on foot, then, as the snow melted, on his faithful Baldy once more.

Though his work took him away from camp much of the time, John was continually running foul of the boys who belonged to the other faction, and Ben was the object of their unceasing abuse. A crowd of these fellows would stop their games and yell at them those taunts which are so exasperating to a boy:

"There go those Western jays."

"Look at the kids that don't know the difference between a baseball and a lump of mud."

It was true that our boys were not up on the national game or any other game played simply for amusement; their sports were merely another form of some kind of work.

Then the camp boys began to taunt John on his fighting abilities, their object being to get him to stand up against some one who would be sure to beat him. This was one of John's weak points; he was immensely proud of his prowess as a fighter; so when one of the boys said in his presence: "Worth said to-day that he could lick Casey," he did not correct the falsehood there and then, but put on an air of superiority that had the effect desired. Casey, though not a big fellow, was out of his 'teens, and had the reputation of being a "scrapper from 'way back," as the boys said. He also heard the young mischief-maker's statement. "Jab him, Casey; he's only a bluffer," said several of his companions. He could not ignore the challenge which was plainly indicated, and, according to boy customs, not to be avoided. Few boys know how much bravery it takes to dare an unjust imputation of cowardice. John and Casey were soon talking hotly—not that they had anything against each other, but they were being egged on and neither

could withstand the pressure. The result was a fight, the consequences of which had great influence, on one of the principals at least.

Casey was really a grown man, and John had never fought in earnest with one old enough to wear a mustache, but his blood was up now and he would not back down.

The two retired behind a large stable and a crowd of men and boys formed a ring.

"Keep him at arm's length," whispered Ben, as he took off his brother's coat and *cinched* up his belt firmly round his waist. "Don't let him hug you and you'll lick him, sure." Ben spoke confidently, but he was in reality consumed with anxiety. John said nothing, but the look of reckless determination on his face spoke volumes.

The two antagonists now stood face to face, but neither had yet struck a blow. "How do you want to fight?" Casey asked.

"You fight your way and I'll fight my way," John answered; and at the word struck out. The crowd yelled "Foul," but neither took any notice. The blow was not a hard one, but it served its purpose, for it stopped the talk and began open hostilities.

Casey came at John, his arms jerking back and forth, but hitting nothing. John drew his lead and then, as his guard was lowered, threw in his

own left with staggering effect. This angered Casey greatly, and he rushed his opponent in a vain effort to get in a deciding blow at once; but his rushes were avoided nimbly, and as his defence was careless many blows were rained on his head and body. Evidently the boy knew more about boxing than he did, Casey thought, and as the method of fighting was left undecided he determined to change his tactics. In a rough-and-tumble fight he knew his age and strength would tell. To close in and grapple with John was his purpose now. So far the battle was in the boy's favor, and a number of the wavering ones came over to his side. "He's getting low now, Worth. Swing on him," said one of them; and John, acting on the advice, quickly landed a stiff one on the jaw. Casey fell, but John stood to one side and waited till he got up. He was angry clear through. Again and again he rushed, but was beaten off each time. He aimed a savage blow, which John almost succeeded in dodging. It landed lightly, but gave Casey the opportunity he sought and they clinched, the miner hugging with all his might.

"Oh, John!" muttered Ben.

"Good work," yelled the crowd, who had suddenly deserted to Casey's side.

It was the greatest squeeze that John had ever

had. The blood rushed to his head, his breathing became more and more difficult, but still he struggled, twisted, and strained, and at last both fell and the man's terrible grip was loosened. He did not let go, however, and in a couple of seconds both were on their feet and struggling with might and main to gain the mastery. Again they went down, this time John underneath and on his back. The crowd paused an instant before pulling Casey off, but during that pause he made good use of his time, raining blow after blow on John's upturned face. John was licked.

Most of the spectators followed the victor, but some remained behind, not to sympathize and condole, but to jeer at John's defeat and laugh at his discomfiture. It was gall and bitterness to the boy, and he was glad to get away out of earshot. Ben helped him put on his clothes and led him down to the creek to bathe his bruised face.

"What's the matter with your hand?" Ben said suddenly, as he noticed the blood trickling over the knuckles of his brother's right hand.

"He chewed it," John answered.

"What! bit you!" Ben exclaimed.

"My arm was around his neck and he grabbed my thumb in his mouth. He wouldn't have got me so easy but for that."

For a time neither boy said a word. How a

man could do such "dirty work," as Ben said, was more than he could understand.*

On the way back to the house several fellows stopped to call at John as he went by, for the news had spread. He realized that it would take a long time to live down this disgrace. His heart was sore; it seemed as if this was the culmination of all his hardships; he felt as if his life had been all work and no play, that his efforts to do his duty had not been appreciated, that though other boys might enjoy themselves much of the time (and he had seen them in this very camp) he must work, work, work; he felt, in short, very much abused and at swords' points with everybody—his brother excepted. One more blow of bad luck, he thought, would "cap the climax" and would result in he knew not what desperation.

Before the boys had reached the house the news of his defeat had been made known there, and Mr. Worth, thinking that John had become more or less a bully, determined that the lesson he had received should be a lasting one.

"Hello, John!" he said jovially, as the two boys came slowly in, "you met your match today, I hear. Whipped you well, didn't he?"

* John Worth bears the marks of Casey's teeth on his thumb to this day.

John hung his head and tried to hide the tears that would rush out over his swollen cheeks.

"Hold up here, let me see your face," said the father roughly. "Well, he did give it to you: eyes blacked, face scratched, mouth swollen—you're a sight. You'll be more careful next time, I guess," he added.

John turned on his heel and left the room.

"Ben," he said, on meeting his brother outside, "I'm going away."

"Going away?" Ben repeated in wonder. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know; I don't care. I'm not going to show my face in camp again; even father at home laughs and jeers at me. I'm going to leave to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

A TRYING JOURNEY.

"I'm glad I'm going, Ben, but I'm sorry to leave you; you'll go back and tell them I've gone—and be good to Baldy, won't you? I'll write to you when I get to Helena."

It was long past midnight, and Ben was starting his brother on his journey to the great city that neither had seen. It was his present objective point; how far beyond he would go he did not dream.

"How much money have you?" inquired Ben anxiously.

"Nearly ten dollars, with your three. That'll keep me going till I get a job."

"But say, John, wait a few days and we can sell a horse or a saddle." Ben hung on to his brother's arm and tried to pull him back; his small, freckled face was full of entreaty and trouble. "Regan will buy the three-year-old after pay day. You'd better wait."

"Oh, I've thought of all that," said John. "I

could ride the colt off, for that matter, but I'm not going to take away a thing—except enough money to last till I get work."

"Don't forget to write, John, will you? They'll blame me at home for not telling about this, so don't make it too hard for me." Ben's voice was not very steady, and the note of appeal in it affected John greatly. "Tell me if work is plenty, for I'm going myself before long—I'll be so lonesome."

They shook hands without a word, each turning his face away, ashamed of the tears that would come despite their efforts to suppress them.

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

Ben turned down the trail toward home and John continued on in the opposite direction. Day was just breaking; the stars still shone above, while the sun's mellow light brightened the east. Neither boy had any eyes for the beauties of the sunrise; it was hard for them to part and neither could think of anything else. They had been not only brothers but "pardners." Never be-

fore had they been separated. Rocked in the same shoe-box cradle, playing with the same rude toys, sharing the same pleasures and the same fears, braving the same dangers, and dividing bread or blanket when need be, they had grown up so closely that they did not realize the bond till it was about to be broken.

Brothers still they would be, but "pardners" never again.

When out of sight, each, unknown to the other, dropped to the earth and cried bitterly. Ben's share of grief was the heavier. No change of scene for him; no excitement of anticipated adventure; no new sights, experiences, or friends; the world was not spread out before him to enter at will and to roam over; none of the delights of freedom were to fall to his lot. Only duty, weary, commonplace, devoid of companionship and boyish sympathy. He went sorrowfully home.

John, his cry over, felt better. The sun was now coming out in his full strength, the birds poured forth melody, the cool morning was refreshing. In spite of the parting wrench he could not help feeling exhilarated, and the thought that, no matter what might happen, he was free, made him almost joyous. He sprang up, dashed the tears from his eyes, and started

along the trail, shouting aloud: "I don't care." He repeated it again and again, trying to convince himself that he really didn't care.

It was too late to turn back now, even if he wanted to; he knew his father's character, and he did not fear pursuit. He wished now that he had walked manfully up to him and told him. "But he laughed at me," he said aloud, arguing with himself. "I do *not* care," this between his teeth; and then he marched on, his head held high, defiantly.

It was fifteen miles to the railroad, John knew; but how much further to Helena he had no idea —he had not thought of it before.

The trail he was following led him across the range down to the main road on Savage Creek. The mountain walk was fine, the air cool and bracing, the sounds of bird and insect grateful. Before long he reached the creek and drank deeply of its clear waters, washing his bruised face and hands. This he did gingerly, for his wounds were still fresh and his bitten thumb, which no one at home had seen, pained him exceedingly. The danger from a wound by the human tooth is very great, but John realized nothing but the pain.

The slices of bread and meat which Ben had wrapped in an old newspaper for him were eaten

with relish. Though he was somewhat tired, and his body still stiff from the hard usage of the day before, he could not bear to sit still and think. At intervals the tears welled up in spite of his efforts to keep them back. "I won't think," he said, and repeated his assertion, "I don't care," to keep his courage up.

A piece of bread still in his hand, munching as he walked, he struck off down the trail at a strong pace, resolved to reach the railroad and get to Helena quick.

After several miles of sharp walking along the Savage Creek road, he heard the heavy *chug-chug* and rattle of freight wagons ahead of him. He soon overtook them and hailed the driver.

"Hello, kid; where'd you come from?" called that worthy cheerily, from his perch on the near wheel mule, his leg thrown carelessly over the horn of the saddle, the picture of contentment.

"Up the road a way," answered John evasively. "How far is it to the railroad?"

"What d'ye want of the railroad?" asked the "mule skinner" sharply, bringing his foot down and sitting erect.

John knew that these freighters did not look with favor on the railroads or with any one or thing connected with them, for they declared bit-

terly that the railroads robbed them of their business.

"It's only a couple of miles to the railroad," the man continued. "But it's eighteen miles to a station. A railroad's no good without a station; climb in this and take a ride."

John climbed up as the wagon moved slowly along. He was tired, and the cheerful "mule skinner" was a desirable companion, for the time at least. The man lifted his leg again and turned in his saddle, the better to talk to his passenger.

"I was comin' down the road last month," he began, "and the pesky train half a mile away scared my mules nigh out of their wits. Mules don't like trains; don't blame them neither. It's thrown the critters out of work and is forcin' me clear out o' business—haw there, you Mag!" he interrupted himself to shout, as the dainty-footed mule swerved to avoid a mud-hole. "Notice that mule?" queried the teamster.

John nodded an assent.

"She's one of the finest near leaders in the country; watch her gee." A long jerk line ran from the driver's saddle to the bit of the near leader of the eight-mule team. He jerked the line gently and the leader swung promptly to the right. He pulled steadily and the intelligent animal swung back into the road.

"See that? Only a touch and she's awake. That mule's a dandy; been offered two hundred for her—she's little, too." John only nodded, but the teamster, glad enough to have a listener, rattled on about his grievances, the all-absorbing railroads and the men who ran them and spoiled his business.

The wagon did not travel fast enough for the impatient passenger, so before long he scrambled down again.

"Must you go?" inquired the teamster. "Well, you leave the wagon road at the third bridge ahead, and if you cut across to your left you'll come to the railroad." The boy thanked him and started off on a brisk walk down the road. "But it's eighteen miles to a station, and a railroad's no good without a station," shouted the mule skinner, determined to have one more rap at the iron trail.

"So long," yelled the boy in return, and continued at a brisk pace, in his effort to drown gloomy feelings by rapid motion.

At the third bridge he left the road, struck across to the left, and came upon the railroad. It was a disappointment, though he found all that could be expected when a "station is eighteen miles away." The shining rails stretched away, before and behind him, till they ran together in

the distance. The journey was a weary one, the track rough with boulders, the ties hard and unyielding to his heel, and just too near together to allow of an easy stride. Momentarily the heat of the sun increased, and the track seemed to reflect it back more intensely. There was no shade and the heavens were brazen. He stopped at every brook to drink and bathe his blistering feet and cool his aching hand. Though he had eaten nothing since early morning he did not feel hunger, except in its weakening effect. On and on he trudged, hour after hour, until swinging his legs became mechanical and he ceased to feel even weariness. At length a cooling rain began to fall, wetting him thoroughly and arousing him to faint gratitude for the relief it brought.

Just before nightfall an object loomed up far down the track; it was the station at last! The boy struggled on, limping, his mouth open and dry, his bitten hand swollen to twice its usual size; and now reaching a water tank near the platform, he dropped down by it, cruelly tired.

After a short rest, he raised his head and looked around. Not another building was in sight but the station, and not a morsel of food had he eaten since early morning. "I'll tackle

the station people for something to eat," he said to himself, and, suiting the action to the word, presented himself at the door. A woman was there, but in the dusk she took him for a tramp, slamming the door in his face when he asked for food. His only hope now was to catch a train and reach some settlement. The station agent dashed his last hope by saying that the last train for the night had gone; but noticing the boy's forlorn appearance he spoke to him kindly, so John plucked up courage to say: "Where can I buy something to eat?" The man responded by bringing him food, and, while the boy was gratefully eating, told him that he would be glad to let him rest on the waiting-room floor during the night, but since the rules of the road did not permit of this the best shelter he could offer was a vacant building across the track. John accepted the suggestion gladly, for he was tired in every fibre. "Good night; that supper was bully, thank you," he said to the agent.

"Looks like rain," said the other, following to the door. "Hello, there's a fire in that house already; must be some other fellows there for the night. You'll have company, but look out that they don't rob you. Good night."

As John approached the outhouse he saw through the half-open door a blazing fire and a

half dozen tough-looking men seated around it, warming themselves and drying their tattered clothes.

A hesitating knock on the door frame received a chorus of "Come ins." The old door swung back on its leather hinges with a jolt and John entered.

The ruddy firelight gleamed on the face of a slovenly fellow who sat beyond the fire. It was a well-fed face, rounded, and not ill-looking in contour, but grimy and littered with little tufts of whisker; a gray flannel shirt, red neckerchief and greasy-collared tan canvas coat clothed the upper part of his body, and John cast his eye about on four other specimens of the same type, seated on ties about the blaze.

"Where from, kid?" asked one, as all turned to observe the newcomer. All they saw was a weary, hesitating boy. "Come up to the fire," they said cordially, and moved to make room for him. "Which way you goin'?"

"I'm going West," he answered, his glance taking in the whole crowd.

"We're goin' West too. Did you come in on that last freight?" asked one.

John shook his head.

"No? Well, we all got put off here a little while ago; the con and other brakies got onto

us and fired us. We wanted a sleep anyhow—been ridin' two days straight." (John wondered for a time what "con" and "brakies" meant, but finally concluded that the words might be translated into conductor and brakeman.)

"I walked in," said the boy innocently.

A look of pity showed plainly on each hobo's face as he echoed "Walked?" That any one would walk, with a railroad near, was beyond the comprehension of these tramps, for tramps they were—the regulation kind.

"You're green on the road, kid," said one, whose name was Jimmy, as John soon learned. "You'll soon get sick of counting ties," he continued, gazing curiously at the boy, as did they all. "Why, kid, I've travelled this country from side to side and from top to bottom in the last fifteen years and I've yet to walk a step—except off one side to get feed," he added in explanation.

"But I hadn't money to ride," said John, innocently.

"Money? Ho! ho! Why I haven't seen the color of coin this summer. What d'ye want of money? Beat 'em; we'll show you." He spoke with a sort of professional pride, and the expression was reflected on the faces of the other men.

John's bruised countenance had been noticed,

but as he had evidently been whipped in some fistic argument it was etiquette not to question too openly, but to approach the matter indirectly. By degrees they learned that he had had trouble and left home.

"I left home just at his age, boys," said Big Larry, an American-born Irishman.

"That so?" said one encouragingly.

"Yep, 'twas like this. Back in the East—" And Larry launched forth on a recital of the circumstances which led him to "take to the road" and follow it ever since.

Two others had similar experiences. Jimmy, however, frankly admitted that he took to it from choice. "When I was twenty-one," he began, "I was engaged to be married, and expected to settle down and be a family man." This statement seemed to amuse the hoboes, for they laughed uproariously. "My mother—she's a widow," Jimmy continued unmoved, "gave me five hundred dollars to set me up in the butcher business in our town in Ohio. Well, things went on fine till pretty near the happy day, when I began to see that the girl was getting offish and I told her so. She got hot and said something about another chap that I didn't like, and I quit her—quit her cold." A grunt of approval went round the circle.

"It cut me up some and I got to drinkin' a little, and soon I was drinkin' harder. The five hundred my mother gave me and the five hundred I had already saved up went in no time, for before long I was drinkin' like a fish all round the town. My mother wanted me to swear off, and said she'd give me another start, but I knew it wasn't no use and told her so and pulled out of the town on a freight train. Been at it ever since."

"Pretty tough on your mother," said Larry.

"You must 'a' had about a thousand, Jimmy," ventured a less thoughtful one.

"Yes, it was pretty tough on the old lady, but I was no good for that place, and she'd spent enough money on me. Had about a thousand, an' it's more than I've had since all put together, an' more than I'll ever see again," the tramp added, musingly. "I'll never leave the road now; I like it. A man doesn't have to worry about anything, he's better without money an' he gets enough to eat, always seein' new places, learnin' about the country, and findin' new friends."

Most of this speech was made for John's benefit, and he listened with interest.

"Now, boys, not one of us had seen the other forty-eight hours ago, and yet here we

are round our fire talkin' sociable, spinnin' yarns and hearin' 'em told; and I'll bet we're happier than any six millionaires in New York city."

"Yes, we are," they said emphatically, in chorus. John thought much and said nothing.

"People s'pose we don't have to work," said Shorty, another of the group, "but I'd like to see them dudes work from Chicago to 'Frisco or a freight train. Why, them fellers don't know a brake beam from a drawhead, to say nothin' of ridin' rods, breakin' seals on box cars, foolin' brakies, and a hundred other of the little fine points of our trade."

"An' then," chimed in another, "if we don't work much, we don't get much, so what's anybody else got to kick about, s'long's we're satisfied?"

Everybody agreed, and the group dropped into a cheerful silence.

John had listened, it must be confessed, rather admiringly; the freedom and apparent ease of the life fascinated him, and he had half a mind to become a hobo. He did not realize the degradation that went with it, the dishonest acts that were necessary to secure food without money, the hardship it entailed, and the constant uncertainty of it all.

The thing that bothered him was the food supply, and he finally ventured the question: "Where will you get your breakfast in the morning?"

"Breakfast? Well, we may not get it till dinner time, but we'll get it. There are a few houses at a gravel pit half a mile ahead, where we got supper last night, but they're hard to work and we'll have to get to Helena before we chew," explained Larry cheerfully. "But you're all right with that hand of yours," broke in Jimmy. "You can work the sore-hand racket all right; just show that to a motherly-looking woman and she'll fill you up quick."

"I worked the sore-hand dodge myself for a beautiful hand-out last night down at the gravel pit," said Shorty.

John began to realize that it was a pretty precarious and mean way of living, to depend on people's generosity for sustenance.

As the evening passed the talk subsided, and when the suggestion to sleep was given there was not a dissenting voice—from John least of all. All lay down in a row, their feet toward the fire. The coats had been taken off and spread over the row so that each made a covering of two thicknesses.

Toward morning the boy was awakened by a

hand that fumbled about his pocket—the one which contained his money. Fortunately he had taken the precaution before going to sleep to put his own hand in and grasp the money. His hand was being slowly withdrawn when he quickly turned over, and then, fearing to sleep again, he rose and sat down by the wall, his head against the rough boards.

At daybreak a freight train came rumbling into the station and stopped. In an instant the tramps were up, and, separating, ran for the train. John was left alone, wondering what to do, but only for a minute, for Jimmy came running back, and with a hurried "I'll help you," rushed him over to a pile of ties. When the trainmen had gone into the station, Jimmy took the boy over to a car and pointing under it said: "Never rode a brake beam? Well, I'll show you. See that brake beam?" He pointed out the bar that held the brake shoes and crossed from wheel to wheel under the car. "And those rods running lengthwise from it? Well, you sit on the bar and hold on to the rods. See, like this," and he slipped under the car and sat down on the wooden bar, his legs dangling and his hands grasping the rods. "I see," said John, and in a second had taken Jimmy's place.

"Good, here's my board; I'll get along with my

coat wrapped round if I need to," and he handed a board a foot long and eight inches wide, having a slot cut in one end. This John fitted over the rod, and it gave him a safer and more comfortable seat.

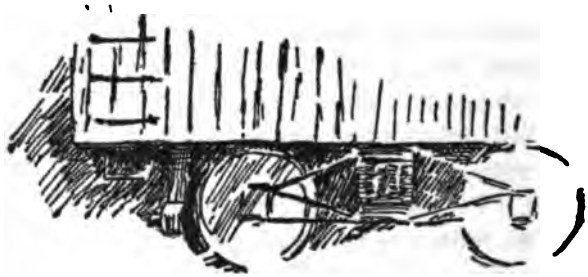
"Here they come; keep dark." Jimmy disappeared, and the conductor's lantern came swinging down toward the engine; his feet crunched the gravel as he passed, and John's heart was in his mouth.

"Pull out at once," was the order, and the engine backed viciously for its start, nearly jerking John from his perch.

"Say, kid, I forgot to tell you"—it was Jim alongside again—"look out and don't get pinched in the air-brake rods; they're bad. When the train's stopping, keep low and you'll be all right. I'm on the next car behind."

The train was now gathering headway, and John wondered how Jimmy would reach the wheel trucks between the now fast revolving wheels. A peculiar sensation came over the boy —half fear, half exhilaration. The whirring wheels clacked and thumped the rail joints, the ties flew underneath dizzily, the dust rose like a fog, and the wind of the train rattled the small stones of the roadbed together; the heavy car swayed above him dangerously near, and John,

half choked and wholly terrified, wondered if he would come out of this irresistible whirlwind of a thing alive. All he could do was to grip the rods at his head and hang on.



CHAPTER XII.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

For a time John could do nothing but hang on like grim death. He was half unconscious; the noise was so great, the dust so thick, and the motion so altogether terrifying that he was nearly stupefied. After a while, however, he noticed that the dreadful racket did not increase, that the clicking of the wheels over the rail joints had become regular, and that all the sounds had a sort of humming rhythm. His nerves quieted down somewhat, and he realized that he was still alive. His grasp on the braking rods overhead relaxed slightly, and he began to look around him—as much as the dust would allow. The train was moving at good speed. The ties below seemed first to rush at the boy threateningly, and then in a twinkling disappeared behind; the telegraph poles along the track had the same menacing attitude and seemed bent on his destruction; objects further off went by more leisurely. It looked as if the whole earth, and everything on

it, was trying to run away from the standing train.

John soon found that it made him dizzy to watch the earth slip away from under him, so he turned his eyes to his surroundings. The wheels moved so swiftly that they would have seemed to be standing still were it not for the side motion, alternately checked by the flanges; a spot of mud on the rapidly turning axle looked like a white ring. Though this mode of travelling was dangerous, dirty, and unpleasant in many ways, John decided, in the recollection of his fatigue the day before, it was at least better than walking.

In half an hour the wheels thudded heavily over a switch joint, the speed of the train slackened, and the cylinder of the air brake under the centre of the car groaned a warning. John remembered his instructions and bent low to avoid the big iron lever. He watched it swing slowly toward him—nearer, nearer; the rod attached to it tightened until its vibrations sung in his ear. The train slowed up and then stopped with a jolt. "Phew! that was close," he murmured to himself. He did not dare to get out of his cramped position for fear he would be run over. His eyes, nose, and mouth were filled with dust, his back ached from his stooping posture, and the smell of

grease and foul air escaping from the released brake was overpowering.

"Come out, kid, it's all right." It was Jimmy who spoke. John crawled out, glad of a change. A short stop was made at the station, during which the boy and the tramp lay in hiding in a ditch.

The engine tooted, and they rushed up the embankment, but before either man or boy could reach his perch the train had begun to move. John managed by following Jimmy's directions to scramble under and on to his brake-beam seat, but by the time he was safely stowed away the car was going at a good speed. The boy feared greatly for his friend's safety. Jimmy, however, seemed entirely unconcerned; he ran alongside and caught one of the side rods that run under every freight car and look like the truss of a bridge; putting his foot on the end of the brake beam, he swung himself under and was soon sitting in state opposite John, but half a car's length from him. This was in reality a very difficult feat, though it seems simple. If, in jumping from the ground to the bar, his foot should slip, it might easily get caught in the revolving wheels, or it would be easy for him to lose his hold when swinging under—sure death would follow in either case. John only breathed com-

fortably when he saw his companion seated in comparative safety on the other braking gear.

Before Helena was reached several such stops were made and John learned to swing himself under to his perilous perch, when the car was in motion, with comparative ease.

It was a long and most tiresome trip for the boy. Although he got accustomed to this mode of travelling before long, the dirt and smells, the constrained position, and the necessity for caution and concealment were all very disagreeable to him. He was overjoyed when he heard one brakeman call to another: "Well, Dick, you'll see your old woman in three hours now."

The train came to a halt before entering the railroad yards of Helena, and Jimmy (who seemed to consider it his duty to look after John) was alongside in a minute. "We'll leave here, kid," he said. "There's p'lecemen in Helena, so I hear, and they nab a man climbing from under a car."

A collection of wooden houses huddled round the station and "yard" was all they saw at first, and John at least was disappointed, for he had heard much of the magnificence of the place. He learned soon that this was but the extreme suburb and that the town itself was some two miles away.

Jimmy was for separating there and then, each to forage for food on his own hook, but John, mindful of his many kindnesses, insisted that they should share the meal which he procured. The supply of ham and eggs and steak that they put away testified not so much to the excellence of the fare as to the keenness of their appetites.

This important business finished, they inquired about the town itself and learned that it was reached by a trolley car. Here was a brand-new experience right away. John had heard of electric cars, but had never seen one, and he thought it a wonderful machine; but even more wonderful was the fact that for a ride of two miles a fare of only five cents was charged. He wished that he had a hundred eyes and almost as many ears, so that he might take in all the strange sights that greeted him at every turn. Jimmy, with transcontinental experience, explained many things in language interlarded with strange hobo slang. When the yellow trolley car finally reached the town, the boy opened his eyes in wonder—here was the real city.

The companions walked along the busy street, which to John's amazement was paved with stone blocks, the sidewalks being covered with bricks and flags. As he saw the crowds of people he thought there must be some sort of a celebra-

tion going on. In front of a saloon a number of men were gathered, and among them Jimmy recognized some friends. John, however, was not content to stand and listen to long discussions as to the best routes to travel, the most likely places where "hand-outs" might be had, and all the rest of the talk that tramps indulge in; so he started off on his own hook on a tour of discovery. "Don't get lost, kid," Jimmy shouted, as the boy went off.

All his life he had been accustomed to almost unlimited space, to nearly perfect quiet, except the noise of the elements, the voices of wild things and of the few human beings. All at once he was thrown into the midst of a bustling Western city, packed solid with business buildings and dwellings, the surface of the earth shod with iron and stone, the very sky stained with smoke, and the air filled with the roar of traffic, the whistle of locomotives, the clang of the electric-car bells, and the shouts of street hucksters. He was almost stupefied with wonder. Then natural boyish curiosity took possession of him, and he began to notice things separately and in detail. He walked along with eyes, ears, and mouth wide open; his head turning constantly as some strange object caught his gaze. The frequent big "saloon" sign did not surprise him,

nor did the "Licensed Gambling House" placard cause him to wonder; he knew them of yore, they were all a matter of course to a Western boy. But when he came to a building six or seven stories high he stopped short in the human tide, like a spile in a rushing stream, and stood with mouth agape in amazement. The plate-glass windows and the gay display behind them, the brilliant signs and elaborate decorations delighted him.

He was walking along slowly, when he caught sight of the most wonderful "outfit" he had ever seen, and stood still in his tracks to take it in. It was a closed carriage with a fine big pair of horses whose trappings were decorated in bright silver. His fresh young eyes took these details in at once, but what caused him to stare was the big man on the box. Perfectly motionless, a stony stare on his smoothly shaven face, John wondered if he was made of wood. His whip, held at just the proper angle in heavy tan gloves, white trousers painfully tight, high top boots, and green coat shining with brass buttons, the whole get-up topped by a big, shining silk hat. For several minutes he watched him, but not a sign of life did he betray. Then a woman, richly dressed, came out of a nearby store and entered the carriage, saying as she did so, "Drive home, James." The dummy made a motion

with his hand toward his hat, flicked the whip over the horses' flanks, and the carriage moved off.

John's awesome gaze gave way to a laugh: "Why, he isn't an English lord," he said to himself, "he's only a teamster," and he laughed again.

A boy with a package stopped to look at him. "Whatcher laughin' at?" said he.

"Didn't you see that outfit?" said the other, between chuckles.

"Mean the kerrige?" John nodded. "That's Fleischman's rig. Never seen one before?"

"I've seen 'em in pictures, but I never thought they were true," and John laughed again. "I suppose people *do* go down to dinner at six o'clock as I've read they do," he said at last, a puzzle that had long baffled him clearing away.

"Sure. Whatjer think they did, go up to dinner?" returned the other boy scornfully.

"Why, I didn't see how they could go down 'less they ate in a cellar," said John in explanation. "Who ever heard of people eating dinner at night, anyway?"

From this talk and the big white felt hat that he wore, the boy with the parcel gathered that the other was a stranger to the town and town ways. He felt quite superior and determined to make

the most of it. "Come on down the street with me," he said, and John followed, elbowing his way among the people as he saw the other boy do. They went along together, Charley Braton (John soon learned his name) pointing out the principal buildings, grandiloquently. Charley, who was an errand boy in a dry-goods store, reached his destination and invited his new-found friend to come up, so both stepped into the hallway and then through an iron doorway into a sort of cage, where several other people were already standing. John wondered what it was all about, and was just framing a question when a man slammed the gate and grasped a wire rope that ran through floor and ceiling of the cage. Of a sudden the floor began to rise, not smoothly, but with a jerk that drove the boy's heels into the floor. John's breath caught and he clutched Charley's arm. "Seven," called out the latter, and the car stopped with a jar.

"Elevator?" inquired John.

"Yep. 'Fraid?" questioned the other with a grin.

"Nah. Little bit surprised though; never rode on one before."

"Lots of people get scared, though," said Charley, and began a long account of how an old ranchman and Indian fighter lost his nerve

completely during his first elevator ride, and finally pulled his pistol on the elevator man to make him "stop the thing."

Charley's errand done, they entered the elevator again, which descended so suddenly that John felt as if the bottom had dropped out of his stomach. Both stairs and elevators were new to our country boy, and he concluded that he did not care for either, but he was far too proud to show any trepidation before his new acquaintance.

The boys separated, Charley returning to the store and John to the group of tramps at the saloon. It was not an attractive circle round the beer keg that the boy joined, and even he realized that they were more dirty and shiftless than any men he had known. But one at least of them had been kind to him, and he was grateful.

"Well, kid, wha'd'ye see?" shouted Jimmy as he drew near.

John told the story with gusto of all the wonders he had seen, and especially his view of the "carriage teamster."

"That's nothin'," said one man. "You see them on every corner in N'York." Immediately there arose an animated discussion as to the possessions of this or that millionaire, and there was

not one of the tramps who did not know some one in the household of a plutocrat. The talk grew apace, and each narrator put forth all his available knowledge of the traits and habits of millionaires. All referred familiarly to individuals of seven-figure fame as "Tom" or "Joe" or "George."

John and Jimmy meanwhile withdrew unnoticed, and the latter evidently had some definite destination in view, for he started off at a brisk pace along the street, commanding the boy to come on. John did so without question, and soon they reached an office building, which Jimmy entered. They finally stopped before a door bearing the sign "Doctor Hamilton," and at this the tramp knocked. A boy opened the door and ushered in the two rough-looking specimens. "Doctor in?" asked Jimmy, hat in hand. The doctor, a mild old gentleman, approached, and John's protector spoke up: "Doctor, beg yer pardin for comin' in, but this here kid has a pretty bad hand," and he held up the boy's swollen member. "There ain't nobody to look after it and it needs a good washin' at least."

"Let me see it," and the doctor unwound the dirty rags, handling the wounded hand ever so tenderly. It was treatment to which the boy was entirely unaccustomed, and he did not know

just what to make of it. Jimmy warned the physician that neither had any money, but nevertheless he proceeded to attend to the sore hand, washing it first, then dressing it and bandaging the whole in clean white linen. John was ordered to come next day. And so, with a kindly smile on his benevolent face, he bade them good day.

The grateful patient tried hard to thank the doctor and harder to thank Jimmy, but he did not succeed very well with either.

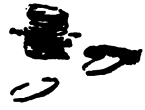
"Now, kid, you've got to sleep in a bed till that hand heals up," said the latter, when John tried to voice his gratitude. "I've got a stable full of hay that I'm goin' to sleep in; but you hunt up a lodgin' house and save your money all you can."

John followed the advice at once and found a place where he could sleep in a bed for twenty-five cents a night.

A week passed, Jimmy had taken to the road again, and the boy was left alone for the first time in a great town. He had been lonely before, but it was as nothing compared to the feeling that now possessed him. To be surrounded with people, all of whom were strangers, seemed to him more depressing than to be absolutely alone with rugged nature.

By this time John's hand had nearly healed, but his money had about given out, and he was looking for work. It wasn't hard for a man in those booming days to find work, but the boy was in the awkward stage of growth when he was too small for a man's work and too big for a boy's—though he had a full-grown appetite and clothes to pay for.

He hunted diligently for a job; day after day he tramped the streets in search of one; he looked into thousands of faces for one he knew. He asked continually for work, and at last, after a particularly trying day, heard of a restaurant where a dish-washer was wanted. He went there at once, but was told that the boss would not be there till evening; later he called again and was told that it was still too early. The restaurant was set back of a saloon, which also bore the legend, "Licensed Gambling House." Instead of going away to return again, John determined to wait. He loitered around the bar-room, sick at heart. It was not a pleasant place to wait in; it had no attractions for the boy, accustomed as he was to open-air life. Several tables were scattered about, and at these sat the gamblers, their faces stony and expressionless, perfectly calm, no matter how luck turned—the result of long and severe discipline. It seemed as if "the boss"



would never come, and John was about to give up when he chanced to look at a table in a far corner and saw, he thought, a familiar face. He was all alertness in an instant, and went over to make sure. Yes, it was Tom Malloy, John's instructor in "the noble art of self-defence." How glad he was to see him! Yet he must not interrupt, for Tom was playing cards for a considerable stake. He must wait and watch his chance to speak. Tom won steadily, and soon the boy became so absorbed in the game that he forgot all about the dish-washing; a friend was involved, so he "took sides" at once. One by one Malloy's opponents dropped out, remarking that it was "Malloy's night," till he alone remained at the table. Raking the chips into his hat he went over to the bar to turn them into the money they represented; John followed, and when the currency was being counted out he approached:

"Hello, Tom," he said.

"Why, hello, kid," answered the man carelessly.

"Don't you know me?" said John, rather hurt at this reception. "I'm John Worth; you worked for my father down in Dakota."

"The deuce you say! You little John Worth? Not so little, either," said Tom in a breath. "Where'dyer come from? What you doin'

round a gamblin' house? It's no place for you."

John remembered his mission and explained.

"Job? Well, I'm just the man to get you one," said Tom cordially. He went back to the restaurant door and called a waiter to him. "Tell Albert I want to see him," he ordered. Albert, the restaurant keeper, soon appeared. "I hear you want a man," Malloy began. "Here's a boy who's as good as any man and an old friend of mine; if you've got a good job, give it to him."

Malloy was a leading character among the gamblers of the town; he won freely and spent freely, and was therefore to be propitiated. Albert graciously admitted that he had a job and that John might have it; he even went so far as to say that "sure he would make a place for a friend of Mr. Malloy's." So it was arranged that the boy was to begin work the next day.

The two passed out together, and Tom noticed the condition of the boy's clothes; they were dusty, torn in many places, and generally disreputable-looking.

"Those all the clothes you have?"

John nodded.

"Well, I'll see if I can't get you fixed up tomorrow."

True to his word, John's friend in need took

him to a clothing store and saw to it that he was supplied with a complete outfit.

John was togged out as he had never been before in all his life; he looked at himself in the glass, feeling awkward and clumsy and wishing his face wasn't so big and red under the small derby hat. He couldn't get used to that hat, so he slyly rolled up his big, old felt one and tucked it under his arm when they left the store. Before Malloy parted from him he made him promise that he would call on him if he had any trouble or did not get along well with Albert.

John began work at once. He yanked off his new coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and started in washing dishes as if his life depended on it. It was a way he had when anything had to be accomplished.

For several months the boy stuck to his job, working steadily and well. The town, or at least the meaner part of it, became very familiar to him. Schools, churches, concerts, and society events abounded, but they might have been in another planet so far as John was concerned. The saloon, the "Licensed Gambling House," the cheap theatre, and the back streets were his haunts. The rough teamsters, miners, and gamblers were his associates. Tom Malloy was his hero; the man's generosity and kindly spirit

won the boy's heart, but the former kept a strict watch over him for all that, and it is doubtful if John could have got into very bad habits if he had desired. The boy soon learned to know all the celebrities of the under-world in which he lived: Peter Aston, or Poker Pete, "handy with his gun"; Charley, or Snoozer, Johnson, also known as "Gain," who played a "close, hard game"; Tom Malloy, with the widespread reputation of being a man "hard to lick."

The class John associated with was a restless lot, seldom staying long in one place, and soon the same spirit infected him. He longed for the open air and open country; the interminable walls of the city oppressed him. It was with great interest therefore that he listened to a chance acquaintance who told of a new job on railroad construction he had secured. John asked several questions and learned that many men were needed, and that there might be a chance for him.

"Where's the contractor?" he asked suddenly, his mind made up. "I'm goin' to ask him for a job."

"I met him half an hour ago at the 'Bucket of Blood,'" answered his new friend. "I'll go along with you; perhaps we'll find him there."

They soon reached the saloon with the sanguinary name, and luckily found the contractor. John stated his errand and stood while the man looked him over. "Perhaps you might work in the cook house," he said at length. "You're too light to drive a scraper."

"Yes, I could do that, but I don't want to. I want out-of-door work. Have you got a horse-wrangler yet?"

As luck would have it, the job John wanted was not given out, and, after telling of his experience, he was appointed night horse-wrangler.

To get a saddle and riding outfit was the next thing necessary, and this Tom Malloy lent him from the store of such things he had won at cards.

John found that to part from the man who had befriended him in his need was the only really trying thing in connection with leaving Helena. Squalid as were most of his associations with the place, he was really sorry to go away from Tom Malloy. The thought of being once more in the saddle, however, delighted him, and it was with a preponderance of joy rather than sorrow, therefore, that he clambered early one morning into the rough wagon that was to convey his party to the scene of operations and saw the city disappear in the distance.

Soon he would be astride of a horse, out in the open. No walls to encompass him, no roofs to shut out the sky—what a glorious and inspiring thought it was!

CHAPTER XIII.

HERDING HORSES AND PANNING GOLD.

"Seems to me," said John to his new partner, Frank Bridges, "that this is a pretty tough gang. Half of 'em drunk, and the rest of 'em ready to take your head off if you speak to 'em."

"Oh, well," answered the other, "some of them got out of money quicker than others and so got out of liquor quicker. It's kinder hard to go back to work in the wilds after loafing round the town a good while. You'll find that they're not such a bad lot when they're sober and get to workin'."

The two were sitting on one of the scrapers that trundled behind the wagons—a vehicle which, though not exactly comfortable, was exclusive—they had it entirely to themselves. All day long they had travelled thus, except at dinner time, when a short halt was made. John said he would almost as lief ride a brake beam as a "break-back," for so he had christened this jolting equipage.

Long after dark they saw the white tents of the camp loom up, and in a minute after their arrival it was the scene of bustling activity. Orders were bawled, greetings were shouted, the teamsters yelled and swore at their horses. But above the din rose the voice of Old Murphy, the contractor: "Here, boys, rustle round and get these horses out of the harness. Worth, saddle up and take these horses to the other bunch and watch 'em all till morning." Then, turning to his foreman: "Ricks, get this fellow a saddle horse."

"The others are tied up yet, Mr. Murphy," the man ventured.

"What! Not out yet?" roared the boss. A regular tirade followed, and John realized that he must do his work well to escape a tongue-lashing. He was rather staggered at the order to saddle up and get out at ten o'clock at night, with a lot of strange horses, in a country he did not know.

"Say, Frank," he said to his friend, who was busy unloading the rolled-up "beds" or bedding, "this is no joke; I don't want to lose a lot of horses and maybe kill myself in the bargain—it's going it blind with a vengeance."

"You'd better make a stab at it, anyhow," he was advised. "The old man's raging, and you

might lose your job if you showed the white feather."

"You ready yet, Worth?" It was Murphy's voice, and John jumped at the sound of it.

"Give me a hand, Frank, will you. Bring the blasted old cayuse over here while I get the saddle ready. I'll do it or bust," and John suited the action to the word.

In a few minutes the boy was in the saddle and following the already straggling bunch of horses.

"Keep your eye open for prospect holes," shouted Frank.

"You want to watch those horses like thunder, Worth," called out Murphy, who seemed to be everywhere at once. "They're strangers to each other, and they'll split up and scatter to the four winds if you don't watch 'em. Some's from Oregon and some's from Utah, and if they get separated it'll cost mor'n they're worth to get 'em back again. You've got fifty-six head—keep counting 'em." The "old man" apparently did not want him to get beyond the sound of his voice, but kept following and shouting instructions. Perhaps he realized that he was giving the boy a trying, and possibly dangerous, task.

"All right," shouted John cheerfully, but at heart he was not so confident.

It was long after ten and quite dark; the horses in front were mere shadows and could only be distinctly made out by the tramp of their hoofs. To count them exactly was almost impossible, for it was hard to tell where one horse began and another ended. The old beast John was riding, however, knew his business, and it was well he did, for it was necessary to trust almost entirely to his acuteness and keen sense of smell. Horses and herder splashed across the creek and pushed their way through the brush and up the hill opposite.

The boy realized that his work was cut out for him, and he determined he would see the thing through. The hills and gulches round about were new to him. There might be precipices, quicksand bottoms, bogs, and, worst of all, the night-rider's menace, old prospect holes. These were short, narrow, and often deep ditches dug by miners in their search for the precious metal. Besides all this, he was on a horse he had never thrown a leg over before and of whose disposition and capabilities he knew nothing.

"If I only had Baldy!" he thought as the cayuse he was riding plunged into the brush after the retreating bunch.

Immediately his trouble began. The old horses, old companions, jealous of the new-com-

ers, tried to elude them, and the latter were none too anxious for their company. John could only gallop forward and back and all around, restraining this scattering tendency as best he could, and depending on his mount's sagacity to avoid holes and obstructions. A merry dance his charges led him—merry in the lively sense only—up and down, in and out, over what kind of country he could only guess. All he could see of his troublesome charges was a shadowy back now and then, or a high-thrown head silhouetted against a lighter patch of sky or a bank of sand.

He judged himself to be two miles from camp before the animals seemed to think of stopping to feed. Even then they were determined to separate, and it taxed John's vigilance to the utmost to keep them together. His horse began to tire, it was many hours before daylight, and something had to be done—at once. An old gray mare carried a bell on her neck and John noticed that the rest of the bunch followed her blindly. If he could catch and tie her up the others might be more inclined to stay in one spot. How to do this was the question. She was too wily to be caught by hand, and if in throwing the rope the loop missed, she would scatter the entire herd in a minute. For a while he gave up the

plan, but it grew more and more difficult for his weary horse to keep up the continued darting to and fro.

At last he decided to make the trial—it was the last resort and the cast must be successful. He made ready his lariat, holding a coil in his left hand and the wide loop in his right, and waited an instant for a good opportunity. The gray mare stood out more distinctly than the other horses and made a better mark, but at best it would be a difficult throw. For several seconds John sat still in his saddle, the noose circling slowly round his head, his arm still, only the supple wrist bending. The old mare was watching him. The rope now began to whistle as its speed increased. Suddenly the belled mare snorted and started off on a run; John shut his teeth hard, threw at what looked like a neck, took a couple of turns round the horn of the saddle with the slack rope, then waited.

Almost at once the line tightened. A gentle pressure was put on the bridle rein, and the pony's weight checked the mare in her flight. The throw was a good one, and the mare was caught. The shock was great, and John's pony was green at this sort of business and the tightening cinches made him jump in lively fashion. The mare too had not learned that it is useless

to "run against a rope," and for a while kept John and his mount busy; but the increasing tightness of the slip noose round her neck soon quieted her and enabled the boy to tie her up short to a tree.

The remedy proved to be effective; soon all the horses were feeding quietly round the tied leader.

John congratulated himself on his success and prepared to take a much-needed rest, but was interrupted by the sound of another bell far up the gulch. Evidently there were other horses feeding near, and it was essential to keep them separated; so he trotted to a point between the herd and the place from which the ringing came. Again he dismounted from his sweating pony and sat down to rest, when, chancing to glance over his shoulder, he saw a small fire blazing a quarter of a mile away. "No rest for the weary," he grunted resignedly, mounted once more and started out to investigate. As he rode slowly nearer he made out a man sitting cross-legged by the fire, his face in strong relief, his back almost lost in shadow. Behind stood a saddled horse, barely showing in the gloom.

John rode up, slapping his chaps with his quirt to let the stranger know that he was a horseman also and giving fair warning of his approach.

Otherwise he might be taken for a horse thief and shot on sight.

The stranger rose quickly and retreated into the shadow. John did not like this. "Hullo, pardner!" he called, drawing nearer.

"Hullo, stranger," replied the other. "Are you lost?"

"No. I'm Murphy's night herder. Pretty dark night, isn't it?"

The man returned to the circle of firelight, his suspicions allayed, thus evidencing his own honesty. John dismounted and came up to him, glad to have some one to talk and listen to.

"You night-herdin' too? I heard a bell ringing up the gulch and I guessed there was another bunch of horses up there."

"Yep. I've got Brady's horses up there," and he nodded in the direction of a dimly visible lot. John described the difficulties he had experienced and asked if there were many prospect holes about.

"Yes, lots of 'em," answered the Brady man. "An' they're deep too. I was ridin' along with my bunch last spring, spurrin' my horse to get ahead of the critters, when he went plump into a blamed hole—and he's there yet. I only got away by the skin of my teeth.

"I guess I'm in great luck to get through this safe," said John. "I was never on this range till after dark to-night."

"Horses all there?" inquired the other, nodding towards John's charges.

"Sure. But I guess I'd better count 'em."

"My horses are like a lot of sheep. I'll go along with you."

The two rounded the animals together again and counted them as well as the darkness would allow. They agreed that they numbered fifty-six and John breathed easier.

And so the first night passed, the two herders chatting pleasantly till dawn, when they parted, agreeing to meet some other night.

A little before daybreak John rounded up his bunch and began driving them in the direction of the camp. When daylight came he counted them again and to his satisfaction found them all there. In spite of the tiresome trip of the day before, the hard riding of the preceding evening, and the long night's vigil, he felt as gay as the lark that soared overhead pouring out a song entirely out of proportion in volume to its size. He hummed blithely an Indian war chant, made over for the occasion, and breathed in the early morning fragrance with a feeling of exhilaration that made him forget for the time that he

had gone to work the night before supperless and had not put his teeth into anything edible since.

The sight of the cook preparing breakfast speedily reminded him that he had an "aching void," which seemed to extend to his very heels.

The boss's query, "Got 'em all, Worth?" was answered, with pardonable pride, in the affirmative. For John felt that he had done good work.

The breakfast was soon over, and what a breakfast! Baked beans, bacon, bread, and coffee, a feast fit for the gods, John thought, as he rolled into the bed that Frank had previously showed him. He was sound asleep in a minute and entirely unconscious of the bustle and noise about him. Murphy was giving orders in stentorian tones that could be heard half a mile away; the unwilling horses were being harnessed to the big scoop-like scrapers and to the wagons containing tools; the men were divided into gangs, the new arrivals, cross, surly, and suffering from aching heads, starting with irritating slowness. Soon all hands were hard at work, "moving hills to fill up hollows," making a level trail for the iron horse.

At this point there was much digging and scraping to be done, a deep cut and a long "fill" on the other side. At noon the men trooped back to dinner—silent until their hunger was satisfied,

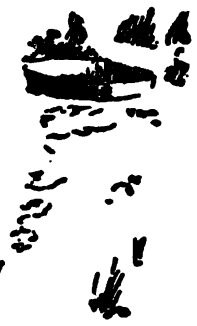
then noisy and boisterous—but John slept peacefully through it all.

About four o'clock he woke up and gazed about him wonderingly. He was lying in a tent, through the open flap of which the sunlight streamed.

A dip in the stream that ran close by refreshed him greatly and dispelled the sleepy, heavy feeling that had possessed him. The creek was clear and cool, and John lingered on its banks half clothed, digging in the sand and mud with his bare feet and hands. As he was dabbling in the moist earth, he came across some sand that had black streaks in it. His curiosity was aroused, for he had not seen the like before, and he gathered some in his hat, intending to ask what it was.

The cook was busy washing beans for supper, so John sat down on a log near by and watched him idly. His thoughts wandered back to the coal camp, and he wondered about Ben and Baldy; he longed for both, and for the moment

was tempted to go home and see them; then he realized that he had chosen the path he was now travelling for himself and felt that he must follow it out to the end. He thought of the journey to Helena, of Jimmy the hobo, and of the life he had just left. His brown study was interrupted with a jolt. "What's that you've got in your hat?" It was the cook, speaking rather excitedly.



"Oh, that? That's some sand and gravel I picked out down the creek; brought it up to ask what it is."

"Well, it looks to me like gold." This impressively.

"But it's black," objected John.

"Yes, the black is magnetic iron and often holds gold—maybe there's enough to pay. Do you know how to work the pan?" Cook was evidently interested.

The boy professed his ignorance, and the other volunteered to show him.

The pan, a flat, round, shallow tin affair, was taken down to the spot indicated by John and the lesson began. A little gravel, which included some of the black sand, was scooped up. Then the pan was taken to the creek, dipped under, and the water was allowed to run out slowly. This was repeated over and over, and each time

a little sand and gravel was washed over the edge. At last only the black sand, being heavier, remained. This the cook showed triumphantly.

"Only a little black sand! Where's the gold?" inquired John.

"It's in the sand, and has to be separated from it by quicksilver, which absorbs the gold; then you can throw away the sand," explained cook, who had put away the residue carefully in a bottle and was dipping up more gravel.

"But how do you take the gold out of the quicksilver?" The boy was determined to get to the bottom of this thing.

"Why, you can put it in the sun and let it evaporate, leaving the gold, or you can send it to town to be separated and run the risk of losing both quicksilver and some of your gold."

John tried panning, but he found it needed a much more practised hand than his; he spilled out water, gravel, and all, or else he didn't accomplish anything. Cook's teaching was careful, however, and before long his pupil was able to gather enough sand, after sleeping and before beginning his night's work, to realize fifty or sixty cents' worth of gold when separated.

Immediately after supper John had to saddle his horse and drive the work stock out to feed. This task was becoming more and more easy as

the horses learned to know each other. He met Curran, Brady's wrangler, regularly now, and the companionship helped to while away the long night hours very pleasantly.

Curran was of medium height, stoop-shouldered, and rather bow-legged from long contact with a horse's rounded body. He was awkward and stiff when afoot, an appearance accentuated by the suit of canvas and leather that he wore. In the saddle he was another being, graceful, supple, strong—seemingly a part of the beast he rode. His skin was tanned and seamed by long years of exposure to the sun. He might be the very hero himself of a song he sang to John one night.

BOW-LEGGED IKE.

Bow-legged Ike on horseback was sent
'Rom some place, straight down to this broad continent.

His father could ride and his mother could, too,
They straddled the whole way from Kalamazoo.

Born on the plains, when he first sniffed the air
He cried for to mount on the spavined gray mare.

And when he got big and could hang to the horn
'Twas the happiest day since the time he was born.

He'd stop his horse loping with one good, strong yank,
He'd rake him on shoulder and rake him on flank.

He was only sixteen when he broke. "Outlaw Nell,"
The horse that had sent nigh a score men to—well!

He climbed to the saddle and there sat still,
While she bucked him all day with no sign of a spill.

Five years later on a cayuse struck the trail
Whose record made even old "punchers" turn pale.

He was really a terror; could dance on his ear,
And sling a man farther than that stump—to here!

A man heard of Ike; grinned and bet his whole pile
His sorrel would shake him before one could smile.

So the crowd they came round and they staked all they had,
While Ike, sorter innocent, said: "Is he *bad?*"

And durin' their laugh—for the sorrel, you see,
Had eat up two ropes and was tryin' for me—

Ike patted his neck—"Nice pony," says he,
And was into the saddle as quick as a flea.

That sorrel he jumped and he twisted and bucked,
And the man laughed, expectin' that Ike would be chucked.

But soon the cayuse was fair swimmin' in sweat
While Ike, looking bored, rolled a neat cigarette.

And then from range to range he hunted a cayuse
That could even *in-ter-est* him, but it wasn't any use.

So he got quite melancholic, wondering why such an earth,
Where the horses "had no sperrits," should have given himself birth.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MIGRATION.

All that summer John tended the work stock, keeping them together on good feeding ground during the short night and driving them into camp soon after daylight.

Much of this work was very pleasant; the two herders, Curran and John, met regularly and many were the long talks and interchanges of experiences they enjoyed.

The rainless summer nights were cool enough to be refreshing and yet warm enough to make the time spent in the open air delightful. But when rain came all this was changed. The horses became nervous and restless and required constant watchfulness and continual riding, regardless of treacherous foothold and hidden, water-filled prospect holes. The long, yellow "slicker" or oilskin coat, being cut deep in the back and hanging over the rider's legs to his spurred heels, served but poorly to keep out the driving rain, and by morning he was fairly soaked. Arriving

in camp with his dripping charges, he would dismount stiffly, and after a half-cold breakfast crawl into a damp bed under an oozing tent.

John, however, learned to take things as they came, good or ill, gathering valuable experience from right and left. Curran was a horseman of long standing, and gave the fast-maturing boy a great many points that served him in good stead later in life. He taught him how to detect any uneasiness in the stock that might grow into fright and start a stampede; how to check this by voice and by constant active presence; and, above all, by force of example he showed that only through quick thought and unhesitating exposure of himself to danger could harm to his charges be averted. By nature courageous, almost to recklessness, John learned these lessons unconsciously.

And so the summer passed—herding horses at night, sleeping and panning gold by day. By the latter operation he was able to add, on an average, fifty cents a day to his hardly princely income of seven dollars a week.

As the warm season drew to a close, the night wrangler's work became more of a hardship and less a pleasure; only by dint of constant exercise and a roaring fire was the life made endurable. The night's work over, horse and rider would

come in stiff with cold and not infrequently wet as well.

"Well, kid, the outfit breaks camp this week," said cook to John one cold, wet morning in November as he slid off his patient beast. "Here's your coffee; keep it out of the wet."

"Can't break any too soon for me," said John, sipping the steaming beverage and clinging tightly to the tin cup with both hands for the sake of the warmth it contained.

"Must be pretty tough this time o' year," said cook sympathetically. "More coffee?"

"You bet," answered the other. "I couldn't stand it if I wasn't all-fired tough. I'll have to be tough if I go range-ridin' this winter."

Curran put this thought into his head, where it had been growing until it became a resolve.

"So you're goin' range-ridin', eh, kid?"

John nodded and asked the cook where he was going.

"Well, I'll tell yer," he said, stopping to wipe his hands on the flour bag that served for an apron, "I'm goin' straight back East where my folks live; soon's I get back to town I'm goin' to buy a railroad ticket East and go right off."

"Good enough," said John confidently, but rather sceptical at heart, for he knew of many men whose good resolutions melted under the

direful influence of the first glass of whiskey that went down their throats. "Well, I'm off to bed," he concluded, making for the bed that Frank had vacated but a little while before. He knew he needed all the rest he could get. The following morning, as he came near the collection of tents with the horses, he heard Murphy shouting: "Rustle round now, boys; get the cook outfit loaded, the tents down, and your beds rolled up—quick. We'll be in town by noon."

The work was taken up with such a will that John barely got his share of coffee, bacon, beans, and bread before the cook's stores were stowed away ready for travelling.

It was a very different crowd that now set out for the town, and yet it was the same lot of men. Nine months' heavy, open-air work had dispelled weakness and brought strength, had replaced bad temper with cheerfulness, and had, moreover, filled pockets with Uncle Sam's good coin.

Frank and John, his chum, again sat on the scraper that trailed behind a wagon, not now for fear of contact with ill-tempered, almost desperate men, but for the sake of comparative quiet and to escape the practical jokes that none in the wagon could avoid.

"Well," said Frank, "would you rather wrestle dishes in Helena or wrangle horses in the open?"

"I'd rather wrangle than wrestle," said John, taking the cue with a laugh, "weather or no; and I'd like to go out again soon."

On reaching town the men parted company, each to seek the pleasure that most attracted him. John at once hunted up Tom Malloy, who was still prosperous and evidently glad to see him.

"Well, kid, how did you get along?" he said, in his old, familiar, kindly way. The boy first paid him for the saddle he had borrowed, to which he had become accustomed and attached, and then told in detail of his experiences.

"Do you want to get back to pot-wrestling?" asked Molloy at length.

"No; not on your life!" and John told him of his liking for work in the open and his distaste for town life.

"Right you are, kid," said Tom encouragingly, "the town's no place for you, or for me, either," he added rather sadly. "I'll be done up some day"—a prophecy which proved but too true.

John and Frank took lodgings together, and for a time did nothing but travel round the town, noting the changes that had been made since they had been away and taking in such cheap amusement as the place offered. It was on one of these

jaunts round the streets that John met his friend the cook, blear-eyed, slouchy, and dirty, the bold mustache he was usually so proud of drooping dismally.

"Why, cook, I thought you were in the East by this time," said the ex-wrangler, remembering the solemn resolution confided to him a few days before.

"No, I just stopped for one drink and that settled it," confessed the other. "Haven't a quarter to buy a dinner with now."

John took him to a restaurant and fed him.

This was the first of a series of encounters with ex-campmates. The first feeling was one of wonder and disgust that the demon of drink could make such short work of a man; and then came the fear that the constant drafts upon him would use up his small savings.

"Frank," he said one day, "I've got to get out of this or I'll be stone broke; do you know of any fellow that will take me on a range?"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh," said John, "this gang takes me for the treasurer of an inebriates' home, I guess, and will soon scoop every cent I've got."

"That's it, eh?" returned Bridges. "Well, I'll go down the Missouri with you. I'm pretty well acquainted a hundred and fifty miles or so

below, and I know where I can go range-ridin' for a big cattleman any time."

"If you think you can work me in, I'll go," exclaimed the younger. "I'll buy that sorrel cayuse from Murphy. I can get him for fifteen, I guess, and we'll go to-morrow—that is, if you can work me in." This last was spoken rather dubiously, but Frank assured him that he would fix it somehow, and the compact was sealed.

The balance of the day was spent in getting their outfit ready. Frank was already provided with horse, saddle, and bridle, and the other appurtenances of the rider: chaps, spurs, oilskin slicker, and blankets. Some of these John possessed also, but he still lacked a horse; a few simple necessaries in the shape of a frying-pan, tin cups, coffee, flour, sugar, and the inevitable beans must be supplied for both. The dicker for John's sorrel was made in short order, and by nightfall all the outfit was complete. At daylight the following morning they were busy making up the packs, and a hard job they found it, for nothing seemed to fit, and apparently there was enough stuff to load a whole train. It was made up at last into two packs and lashed securely behind the saddles; they mounted and rode out of the fast-awakening town. One of the two at least was leaving it for a long time,

to return under very different circumstances. Nothing of this sort entered their minds, however, and they went out as unconsciously as if off for a half-day's trip.

Frank knew the country pretty thoroughly, having been over it once or twice before, so it was plain sailing most of the time. Day after day they travelled along at a dog trot—a gait that the Western horse can keep up all day and one which a rider brought up to it finds perfectly comfortable, but which would shake the teeth out of an Easterner. The trail was clearly marked, easily followed, and much of the way wide enough to allow the horsemen to ride side by side.

Though the two had been partners for several months they had seen but little of each other; during the day at the railroad camp Frank worked while John slept, and during the night the reverse was the case. This was the first chance either had of really knowing the other, and both were well pleased. There was plenty of time and opportunity to talk, and they soon found that they had plenty of acquaintances in common.

"Ever been to Miles City?" John said one day as they were trotting steadily along. The leather of the saddles creaked and the cooking utensils

made a regular accompaniment to the thudding hoof-beats.

"Sure. Two years ago this spring."

"That was about the time Dick Bradford and Charley Lang shot each other, wasn't it?" John was referring to a "killing" that was famous the country round.

"Yes, and I was right there in Brown's place at the time."

"Tell me about it, Frank. Some say Bradford was to blame and some say that Lang deserved it. I knew Charley Lang a little and thought him a nice fellow."

"Well," said Frank, "it isn't a long story; it all happened the same day, the quarrel and the killing. For some reason there was bad blood between them; both had been drinking, and a little dispute was enough to make them ready to pull their guns on each other."

"Charley was pretty quick with his gun," interpolated John, full of interest.

"So was Dick; but their friends took their shootin' irons away from 'em, and finally persuaded them to shake hands, and for a time there was no further trouble, but all the old hands feared that the business would not end there. Both men came to Brown's place before supper. Maybe you know the joint—a good many things

have happened there, and Brown himself could tell enough stories to fill a dozen dime novels."

John nodded.

"It wasn't very pleasant there then; the two were plainly looking for each other's gore, and we all wished we could put a couple of hundred miles between them. Well, anyway, Dick saw Charley and called him an ugly name and then invited him to take a drink. He might have refused; that would have been bad enough, but he did worse, accepted, and took the glass in his left hand—which, as everybody knows, is a deadly insult, to accept a man's hospitality with your left hand, leaving your right free to pull your gun."

"But I should think it might just happen so," suggested John.

"So it might, but Charley made his meaning clear by the look he gave Dick. Nothing occurred then—neither had a gun—but after supper they managed to get a six-shooter apiece and soon turned up at Brown's again. When I came in Charley was sitting on the end of the bar, talking to the 'barkeep,' his hat on the back of his head, his legs swinging, the spurs on his heels jingling when they touched—the most unconcerned man going. Dick was leaning against the wall the other side of the room. He was mad

clean through. A couple of fellers were with him, but they couldn't stop him from jerking out his gun. He fired, but Charley had had his eye on him and reached for his six-shooter. The same instant the ball hit him in the chest. He slid off the bar, but as he fell he fired twice, and both shots went through Dick's heart. Dick died right off and Charley lived only a few minutes—he died in my arms."

"What a way to die!" was the only comment John made.

"Those were the very last words Charley spoke," said Frank, more to himself than to his listener.

"I guess Miles City was the toughest place going then," said the boy. "Why, I was driving through the town with my father one day (that was when we were opening a big coal mine down the Yellowstone) and we went under a half-finished railroad bridge and there, hanging from the ties, were the bodies of three men. Lynched. Ugh!" John shuddered at the remembrance of it.

"Was that the case where there was some talk of the men being killed first and hung afterwards?" inquired Frank.

"Yes. There had been a row in Brown's place, and these three had been put in jail, but

during the night they were taken out and in the morning were found as we saw them. The regular vigilance committee had not done it, and the doctor said death first, hanged afterwards."

Both of these characteristic stories were common talk whenever a crowd got together, but neither Frank nor John had heard the facts told by an eye-witness before.

It must not be thought all the conversation of these two was of this blood-and-thunder variety. Frank had lived in the East, and marvellous were the tales he told about the buildings, the people, and their doings. The two were so interested in each other, and what each had seen, that the time passed very quickly, and so John was surprised when Frank said late one afternoon: "See that blue range of hills about thirty miles ahead?"

John looked and nodded an assent.

"Well, Baker's ranch is right at the foot of them, and Sun River runs through it. That's where we're goin'."

The following morning they rode towards the ranch house, past the minor buildings, the barns and sheds, past the hay stack, now bulging with its winter store, past the inevitable horse corral, just then containing several horses which were circling round trying to avoid a cow-puncher's "rope." As they reached the ranch house

proper—a low, single-storied house built of logs and roofed with split logs covered with turf—a chunky, white-haired man in overalls stepped out of the door.

"Hello, Mr. Baker," said Frank. "You see you can't lose me."

"Well, Frank, it's you, is it? I'm terrible glad to see you. How are you?" Mr. Baker's greeting was cordial. "Who's your friend? What's his name?" he added, noticing John for the first time.

He was introduced, and the warm grasp of the hand that John got from the old ranchman won him at once.

"Mrs. Baker will bubble over when she sees you, Frank. Tie your horses and come in."

A long hitching rail ran along the front of the shack, and to this Frank and John made their horses fast.

Mrs. Baker's greeting was even more cordial than her husband's, and the youngster looked on at the display of affection rather wistfully. Nor was he ignored in the general greetings.

"You're just the fellow I want to see, Frank," said the cheerful, kindly, buxom, albeit gray-haired ranchman's wife. "Mr. B.'s getting kinder old to be chasing round the ranch looking after cattle and the range-riders, and I want you

to see to all that so I can keep Mr. Baker at home. Will you do it?" She looked from her husband to Frank and back again.

"I'm looking for a job, and so's my friend Worth here. If you'll take us both I'll be glad to stay," and Frank began to enlarge on John's virtues, and told how they had shared the same bed. He characterized him as a "plumb good feller."

"Of course he can get to work," said the couple together.

"Got a saddle?" asked the old man.

"Yes, I've got a good outfit," answered the boy.

"Well, you can go range-ridin'." The ranchman spoke in a tone that was not to be gainsaid —it amounted to a command. John understood vaguely that range-riding was something like horse-wrangling, only the job he was now about to undertake would last during the day and night too.

The following day the boy was sent forth to his new work. It was cold, and the gray November sky had a look of snow in it; the air, too, felt snowy. In the ranch house all was warm and comfortable: a great fire of cottonwood logs was blazing in the open fireplace, a few pictures and examples of needle-work—the evidences of a

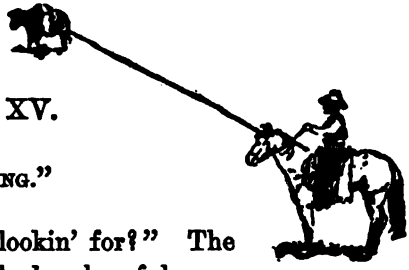
woman's hand—were interspersed with mannish things: rifles in rough wooden racks, antlers of deer and prong-horns, bridles decorated with silver hung here and there on nails, and a long wooden peg, driven into the whitewashed logs, supported a richly carved saddle, Mr. Baker's own.

From this cheer and comfort John went into exile, to last several months—the cold, bitter, winter months of the Northwest.

With the instructions of Mr. Baker and the warnings of Frank ringing in his ears, he started off for the shack he was to share with an old, experienced cow-puncher throughout the winter. The eight miles were soon covered, and he drew up before the little log shack which was to be his winter home. A little box of a cabin it was, perhaps twelve by fifteen feet, built solidly of logs and backed up against a low bank for the shelter it afforded. He dismounted and entered; a single small window lightened the gloom somewhat and enabled him to see the familiar rough bunks on either side, one for each occupant; a rough deal table supported on one side by the wall and on the other by two legs; a frying-pan, a coffee pot, and a few tin cups—none over-clean—hung near the fireplace; these completed the decorations and furniture of the range-riders'

shack. It was one of several placed at varying distances from the home ranch.

After tying his horse and bringing in the few belongings he possessed, he sat down on the empty bunk and waited for Barney Madden, his mate, whom he had never seen. He wondered what kind of a fellow he was.



CHAPTER XV.

"RANGE-RIDING."

"Hello, kid! Who you lookin' for?" The voice was deep and full and had a cheerful, confident ring in it.

John looked up quickly and saw standing in the narrow doorway a man whom he rightly guessed to be Barney Madden. He was a man over thirty, of medium height, rather slight, wiry build, showing good, hard condition; his face, decorated with a brown mustache, was a good one —determination, courage, and an abundant sense of humor could be seen there. He had deep-set, blue-gray eyes, which could be both stern and merry.

"I'm looking for you, I guess," the youngster answered, after a moment's pause, "if you're Barney Madden. My name's Worth, John Worth, and Mr. Baker sent me out here to help you range-ridin'."

"Sure, I'm Barney Madden. I'm plumb glad to see yer; you look like a good, husky kid, and

will help me a lot, I hope. Put your horse in the dug-out yonder, then come back and help me get supper," and he pointed to a little, cave-like house built to shelter the horses of the range-riders in winter.

Soon the sorrel was contentedly munching hay in the warm stables with three or four other horses.

Returning to the shack, John found Barney on his knees blowing the fire vigorously.

"Well, kid, you'd better go down to the creek for some water." Barney spoke in a disjointed fashion, between puffs. "Can you cook?"

The youngster said he could a little.

"Well, suppose you try on this supper. I ain't no cook, never was; don't like it. If you'll take care of the eatin' outfit I'll be satisfied all right."

The supper over, Madden expressed his complete satisfaction, and so John was installed chief cook and head (also foot) of the commissary department.

The following morning his work as a cow-puncher began. At mining, sheep-ranching, and horse and mule herding he had served a full apprenticeship, and he now became a full-fledged cowboy. Each of his previous occupations had helped to fit him for the present undertaking.

Almost from his babyhood he could ride, and about the same time he learned to "throw the rope," as the act of casting the lariat is called, and by constant practice had grown more and more proficient.

The duties of the range-rider, as he soon learned, were to cover a certain territory (which in this case was that section which lay between Saffron and Buffalo creeks) to see that the different bunches of cattle did not get into trouble, or, in case they did get into difficulties, to rescue them. Each morning the two rose with the sun, and after a very simple toilet—to put on a hat and a pair of spurs sufficed sometimes—a breakfast of bacon, bread, and coffee was dispatched. Saddling their mounts was the next thing in order, and each day the horse that had been idle the day before was selected. This operation is easier to describe than to accomplish, for, as a rule, the cow pony has a strong dislike for the clinging saddle, and especially for the hind cinch—it interferes with his free breathing and grips him at a tender spot. When the horse has been led out and the fifty-pound (or more) saddle is thrown over his back, the fun begins; he prances around as if on hot iron, and a keen eye and quick foot are needed to keep out of reach of hoofs or teeth; at length, during an unguarded

second, the flapping cinch is captured and brought under his belly in the twinkling of an eye; the strap on the other side is rove through the ring, and with a quick pull tightened; but the pony, who has been expecting this, takes a deep breath, and at the same time humps his back.

If the rider is inexperienced and secures the strap when the pony is thus puffed up he will come to grief when he tries to mount, the saddle promptly slipping round as soon as he puts his weight on the stirrup, and the knowing horse empties his lungs and straightens his back. John was up to all such tricks, and when "Roany" (the sorrel's companion and the spare horse allotted to the young rider) blew himself up, he simply put his foot up against the pony's side and gave a tremendous and sudden heave. It is a rather inconsiderate and humiliating method—for the horse. Roany grunted protestingly; immediately his girth was reduced several inches and John made the cinch fast.

The horses saddled, the two riders went in opposite directions, visiting the well-known haunt of each bunch of cattle in the section of country committed to their care. In pleasant weather, when the feed was good and water plenty, this was by no means an irksome duty. The horse is fresh and full of life; the rider, exhilarated by

the bracing air and swift motion, shouts aloud from pure joy at being alive. The day's circuit completed, he comes back to the shack, somewhat tired, but the possessor of an appetite that would make a dyspeptic toiler in a city office still paler with envy.

But John began range-riding during the hardest season of the year, when keen, searching winds had to be faced, blizzards encountered, and work of the hardest, most depressing kind had to be done.

"By gum! this beats all," said Barney one morning, some months after John joined him. He got out of his bunk, and, walking over to the single window, looked out. "Snowin' yet. Here this thing's been goin' on fer ten days steady; grass all covered up, cattle near done, and horses worn out—and it's snowin' yet! Seem's if Providence was down on us," and Barney proceeded with his morning toilet, pulling on his boots and grumbling under his breath.

John had something of the same idea in his mind; he began to think all this terrible weather was punishment meted out to him for running away from home. For two weeks the two riders had been in the saddle fourteen hours a day, and the strain was beginning to tell on both men and beasts. This was the terrible win-

ter of 1886-87, when many cattlemen were almost ruined.

"Come, kid; get a move on," said Barney rather wearily. "It's tough, but it's got to be done."

They tramped out into the blinding flurry of flakes and routed out their unwilling horses. There was no frisking, and no tricks to avoid saddling; the poor beasts stood resignedly and allowed their masters to put them into their bonds without a protest.

"So long," shouted John.

"S'long," returned the other.

And so they separated. John followed the frozen Saffron Creek. It was lined with brush which afforded some shelter for the half-starved cattle that were collected in compact bunches at different points for the sake of warmth. Six hundred head of cattle were thus scattered along the two creeks. Each of these John visited, and with shouts and blows urged them from the cover where otherwise they would stay—dazed, stupid, gradually growing weaker till they died in their tracks. Once in the open, they moved more briskly, butting and crowding each other till their blood got circulating again, and they took some interest in searching for the scanty grass revealed by their trampling hoofs.

This morning, after riding a half mile or so from the shack, John came upon a bunch of stock. He shouted at them and slapped those nearest with his hat; soon all were moving towards the open. All went well till a big snow bank was encountered; this the shivering cattle, weakened by hunger, refused to tackle, so John drove his horse into the white bank, and by floundering through two or three times a trail was made. Still the stock refused to go through; but at last, with much urging and pushing by Roany, breast to rump, three were forced to the other side and the others reluctantly followed. One old cow still remained, weak, wavering, her last calf sapping her vitality; back went John and Roany; the rope was uncoiled and the noose dropped over her horns. A couple of turns having been taken round the saddle horn, Roany scratched and tugged, the old cow struggled a bit, and in a jiffy the brave little horse "snaked" her through.

A little further on the same thing was done with another bunch.

From time to time, as he rode along, John saw queer mounds partly or wholly covered with snow: they were the cattle that had succumbed. Many more then living he knew would give up, try as he might and did to protect them.

Further on he noted a fresh victim, and as he drew near two gray, slinking forms left it.

"Hold on, Roany; we'll have to get a shot at those," and suiting the action to the word he pulled his steed up and drew his six-shooter. The wolves were moving off slowly, licking their bloody chops and snarling at the interruption of their feast, their heads turned back toward the boy, their teeth showing, their yellow eyes gleaming. *Crack* went John's pistol, and one fell over kicking. The other bolted for cover.

Crack, crack, the shots rang out, and he too dropped. In a minute both wolves were skinned by making a cut along each leg and down the belly, and then with a strong pull yanking the pelt off. The legs were tied together and both skins hung over the branch of a nearby tree, the location being carefully noted. Then the boy rode on his melancholy task.

As the daylight began to wane, the effect of the hard day's work was felt by both horse and rider, and John looked forward to the time, but

a couple of hours off now, when he would return to the warm shack and satisfy his already ravenous hunger. They were still many miles from shelter, and he knew that travelling must be difficult, if not dangerous.

"Come, Roany, old boy, brace up!" he called cheerily to his fagged mount, giving him a friendly pat on the neck at the same time. "We've got to get home." And he touched him lightly with his quirt. The good horse responded bravely and floundered through the deep snow, emerging on a bare, wind-swept spot where he could make much better time. The pace was so good that John could almost feel in imagination the warm glow of the fire and smell the fragrance of frying bacon.

As they went on their way they reached a steep little hill, the sides of which were covered deep with snow; down this they plunged with ever-increasing speed. Suddenly Roany stopped, stopped so short, indeed, that John was thrown over his head into a bank of snow. As soon as might be he picked himself up, dug the snow out of his eyes, ears, and mouth, and looked to see what the trouble was. Roany was struggling violently. John soon found that he had stepped into a deep badger hole, the sides and top of which, frozen hard, were unyielding, and

held the poor beast's leg like a vise, twisting and breaking the joint badly. The boy saw at once that Roany would have to be killed; that there was no help for him. It would be a mercy to put him out of his misery, for he could feel him quivering, and his eyes bulged out with pain. It was a hazardous position for himself, but for the moment he forgot it in his distress for his horse.

"Roany, old boy, I've got to kill you," he said, feeling that he must justify his act—really one of mercy. "You'll freeze to death if I don't."

He drew his six-shooter from the holster, put the muzzle against the horse's forehead, then, turning his face away, pulled the trigger. A few convulsive struggles and Roany's sufferings were over.

John loosened the cinch, and with considerable difficulty pulled the saddle from under and hung it to a nearby poplar; the bridle was treated likewise; then he stood up and looked around him, wondering what he should do next.

It was no time for sentiment, so he gave his whole thought to the best way of reaching the shack. He was already tired and hungry; the wind was blowing the still falling snow so that it was blinding, and there were seven miles of

rough country to cover before shelter could be reached. John set his teeth, and, after giving a final glance at his faithful horse, he set out. This time, fortunately, he had but himself to think of and look out for, and if he could cover the distance before freezing all would be well. He struck off to the right, and, after floundering through drifts, sliding down steep places, and fighting the biting blast in the open, he came to the creek that ran past the shack: he had but to follow it. Hour after hour he toiled along, his body bathed with sweat, his hands, feet, and face icy cold. The snow blown in his eyes blinded him, hidden obstructions tripped him, and hunger took away his strength. Late that night he stumbled through the door of the shack into the warmth and light.

Barney was wide awake and watching.

"By God! I'm glad you're in," he said, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him forward; then, as the lamp-light shone on him clearly, he turned him round and pushed him out again.

"Your face is white: it's frozen. Get snow on it, quick."

John thought he had had enough snow on him that day—face and all—to last him the rest of his life, but he submitted to the rough rubbing that Barney gave him without a word, and soon

the chalky look gave way to the glow of red blood circulating freely.

He was thoroughly exhausted, but the food and fire prepared by his partner revived him somewhat, and he turned into his rough, hard bunk and slept like a hibernating bear.

When the sun came out bright and warm and the snow began to melt, the havoc wrought by the storm became manifest. Only the strongest cattle remained alive, and of these most were males. The survivors were weak and their bones almost punctured their worn-looking skins. In the more sheltered spots lay many once sturdy cows and heifers that later became a heap of whitened bones. Though the thaw revealed all these horrors, it also uncovered the herbage, and little by little the remaining animals began to gain strength and weight.

Now the range-riders were kept busy pulling the foolish ones out of big holes. Each day the various bunches of cattle were visited, and with discouraging frequency some of them would be found mired helplessly, weakened by their long fast and rendered crazy by fright; their struggles to get out of the sticky mud only sunk them more deeply. It now became the cowboy's duty to throw his rope over the mired beast's horns, make the other end fast to the saddle horn, then to urge

the sturdy little cow-pony forward with whip and spur. The pony tugs, the cow struggles, and soon she is standing on *terra firma*, exhausted, indeed, but safe. This is hard work for the pony and its rider, to say nothing of the cause of all the trouble—which is looked upon merely as so much beef to be saved.

With steady spring weather came the opportunity to visit the home ranch, and John was glad enough to take advantage of it. It was a long time since he had seen Frank, and, of course, there was much to talk of. It was Sunday, in the forenoon, and work, for the time being, was slack. Eight or ten cow-punchers were at the ranch and were amusing themselves with a little buckskin-colored horse. His viciousness had earned him the title of "Outlaw"—that is, he was considered unbreakable.

He was in the corral, small of stature, and, to the uninitiated, innocent enough in appearance; but for all that he had just bucked off Greaser Tony, as good a rider as one could find in a long day's journey.

The cow-punchers sat on the fence and egged each other on to tackle the unconquerable little beast; such an exhibition was great sport to the looker-on, but of doubtful pleasure to the participant.

"Try him, Billy Iron-legs," said one. "You can stick him."

"Try him yourself," responded Iron-legs. "You're lookin' for fun, and that breakfast you put away needs a little shakin' up."

"How'd the earth look from the bird's-eye view you got of it, Tony?" said Frank to Greaser Tony, who was off in a corner counting his bruises and swearing softly.

"Here, Shorty, you ride him; you're always lookin' for somethin' lively."

Shorty's inclination to kick about his mount was well known; he had a way of calling whatever horse was set apart for him to ride "old cow" or "kitten." The proposition to put him on the "Outlaw" and tie him there was hailed with delight, but he dropped from his place on the fence and vanished before any one could lay hands on him. At this juncture Frank came to where John sat, and pointing to one of the men said, "That's the horse-range boss. I advise you to ride that little buckskin yourself; 'twon't do you any harm and they'll think a lot of you."

Any of these men could ride the horse, but it is never pleasant to ride a bucking broncho, and it is sometimes dangerous.

John accepted his friend's advice, and when Frank shouted, "Here's a chap that'll ride the

cayuse," he jumped over the fence into the corral and went up to the outlaw. He was already saddled and a hackamore was twisted round his nose. John thought he knew horses pretty well, for his long intimacy with Baldy gave him the inside track of equine character. The little buckskin's unbroken spirit and courage pleased him and he felt friendly. The little fellow had been abused; his sides were cut and barred by quirting, his head and nose were skinned by rough ropes in still rougher hands.

All men were his enemies, and at John's approach he struck out with his fore feet, but the boy avoided them and caught the hackamore close up to the head. He put his left foot in the stirrup. The horse's eye was upon him, but though the pony was quick he was quicker, and was in the saddle and had caught the right stirrup before the first jump was finished.

Round one in favor of the boy, and the onlookers said "Good!"

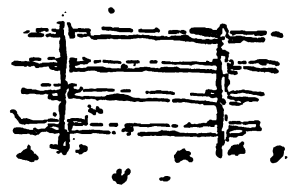
Then began some of the "tallest" stiff-legged bucking ever seen in that corral. Head between his legs, back humped, squealing shrilly, the little horse shot up in the air and came down stiff-legged with a jar that made the ground tremble. Every trick known to the cunning breed was tried—jumping sideways, twisting in the air,

plunging, rearing front and back—all in vain. John stuck like a leech till the "Outlaw" tired himself out. He lasted for fifteen minutes with scarcely a pause. Then with head drooping, nostrils turned out till the red showed, literally drenched with sweat, he stood quiet, his body exhausted but his spirit unconquered.

John dismounted and pulled off the saddle, patted the little horse's neck, and turned him loose.

It was a pretty exhibition of horsemanship, and the spectators appreciated it. It was done fairly, there was no "pulling leather" (holding on) or "hobbling stirrups" (tying them underneath the horse—a great assistance).

A number of the punchers expressed their approbation. "Good work, kid." "That's all right, pardner," said they. The boss said nothing, but a week or two later John got orders to come down to the ranch and bring his bed.



CHAPTER XVI.

A BRONCHO BUSTER.

The Sun River Ranch was a large one, and many cowboys were employed to look after the stock; practically all the work was done on horseback, the cow-puncher or the ranchman never deigning to go afoot—indeed it would not have been possible to cover the necessary ground by any other means. A great many horses therefore were needed, each cowboy requiring three or four, especially at those times of the year when they are ridden very hard and have to be changed frequently. The care and raising of the horse herd were consequently very important parts of the cattle-ranch business. The cow-ponies were bred on the ranch and allowed to run free (it being a well-known fact that they would not stray very far) until the colts were old enough to break to the saddle, when they were taken in hand by certain of the men who showed particular skill in that direction.

John did not appreciate the full significance

of the order to return to the home ranch till Frank, who seemed to be a walking information bureau, enlightened him.

"If you want to go on the horse range Harris will take you," he was informed. "It's cleaner work than chasing cows, and there's more money in it. Want to go?"

"You bet," was John's short and emphatic answer. His encounter with the little buckskin broncho was exciting and he wanted more; then, too, cattle are tame, stupid creatures compared with horses.

"Here's your man," said Frank to Harris, the head of the horse outfit, introducing John. "He says he's ready now."

"Good! You'll find Matt and Jerry in the corral now. Go over and pitch in. There's twenty-five head that I want ridable by the time round-up begins; that's only a week, and you'll have to work 'em hard."

And so John became a broncho buster.

He reached the rough circular enclosure made of split rails laid one over the other alternately and strongly braced to stand the strain that would surely be brought to bear. Inside the corral were about twenty-five horses that had not seen a man half a dozen times in their lives; they were now trying to get as far away as possible from

the two men, Matt and Jerry, and ran frantically around close to the fence that walled them in. They were as wild as deer and about as swift.

Swish! hissed the rope. As John climbed the fence it settled over the neck of a big bay. In a second the boy was inside and hanging on with the other two men to the end of the rope. The bay plunged and tugged, almost frantic with fright and rage, but the three kept their grip and gradually pulled him by jerks away from the bunch and towards the centre.

Nearer and nearer he is worked towards the "snubbing post," a stout log stuck upright in the ground; a couple of turns round this holds him fast. Jerry takes in the slack as he plunges and jumps until he faces the post only a few yards off; then he stops, plants his feet, and sets back on the rope; the tightening noose shuts off his wind, and he wheezes and struggles for a few moments, totters, and falls breathless. Matt springs to his head and sits down on it, the rope is relaxed, and the poor beast is allowed to breathe again. Matt still holding him down, though he struggles with might and main, John knots the rope loosely round his neck and shoulders, runs it back under the hind fetlock, draws it tight, pulling the leg up close to the body, and makes it fast. At a word from Jerry, Matt

jumps to one side and the bay struggles to his feet—helpless, as he has but three legs to stand on. John rubs his neck soothingly, keeping a sharp watch the while for nipping teeth; he believes even a horse has some feelings. Matt then takes the noose from the neck, and, forcing it into his mouth, leads the end back of the ears, makes a half-hitch round the nose, then passes the end through the noose again—lo! a rough sort of bridle or "hackamore." Taking the loose end, Matt begins to pull the animal's head from side to side until he understands that he must follow. The first lesson is, never run against a rope; it prevents comfortable breathing.

Saddling comes next. A saddle blanket is thrown over the horse and rubbed gently up and down his back to acquaint him with the feel of it, then comes the saddle; the trappings frighten him and he struggles, trips, and falls. The operation is repeated, until finally the cinches are drawn and buckled securely. The big bay snorts and trembles in every fibre, terrified at his bonds, the first he has encountered in his wild, free life—he cannot understand it.

Matt and Jerry have ridden two wild horses apiece that morning, so John volunteers to tackle the bay. The horse is still thrashing round at a great rate, but his foot is still tied up and he can

do little. John reaches up and knots his handkerchief round the poor beast's eyes, then releases the foot, mounts quickly into the saddle, and leaning forward removes the blindfold. The frightened animal stands still, cowering like a whipped cur or a chicken that sees a hawk circling above her: he seems to be waiting for the strange, dreadful creature on his back to strike him some fearful blow or sink its claws into his flesh—dreading he knows not what. He bounds forward a few steps—still the burden sticks, and he stops and looks round at it. His fear fades and the courage and energy of his race return; he determines to get rid of this thing that clings so tightly. He leaps forward, runs a few yards full tilt, then stops short, fore legs stiff, hind legs crouching; it's a very sudden jerk, but John hangs on with his knees, leaning far back in the saddle. Again the horse tries the manœuvre; no use; he rears on his hind legs and then on his fore legs; he jumps sideways, bucks, pitches, kicks, without a moment's rest for fifteen minutes. There is no pause, no chance to get a better hold, to take breath; it is a continuous violent paroxysm of motion. At the end of it the bay is well-nigh exhausted and all in a tremble, while John, though pretty well jarred, is calm and master of the situation. The horse at length

submits to the superior will, and, magnificent still but now under control, does his best to carry out his master's wishes.

By the time the bay was well in hand and John was ready to take the saddle off and let him go free for the rest of the day, Matt and Jerry had roped another horse and the same tactics were pursued with it. So the work was carried through till dark, each man taking his turn riding horses that had never been bestrode by a living creature before. There was a kind of wild, exhilarating excitement about it, but it was terribly wearing, and the jar and strain were enough to use up a dozen men unaccustomed to the work.

The following day all the horses were ridden again, with less difficulty this time, though they were lively enough to suit any one. Some took a week's training, some a month's, some were never wholly subdued. To this latter class belonged the little buckskin "Outlaw," with which John had had such a lively time and who made his reputation as a broncho buster. The boy and the horse had much to do with each other for a number of years. Their close acquaintanceship came about thus:

The little buckskin was roped regularly every morning, choked down, and after a great deal of struggling, saddled; then some one of the cow-

punchers would ride him until he was thoroughly exhausted. This was continued so long that the little horse became but a bag of bones, chafed and bruised, a wreck, but unbroken in spirit. In spite of everything he continued a fighter with each ounce of strength that was in him—a "dead game horse."

"He's an outlaw if ever there was one," said Harris one day. "If we can't give him away we'll have to shoot him, for he's making every other horse wild, though he's near ridden to death."

"Let me have him," said John, who happened to be standing near and overheard the remark. "He's a dead game little beast and I like him. I think I can work him."

"Take him and welcome, kid," said Harris, with an air of relief. "The wilder he is the tougher. Tame him and you'll have a star."

And so John came into possession of the little buckskin, whom he named appropriately "Lightning" or "Lite." Jerry said, when the question of giving him a proper name was under consideration, "I've known several horses named Lightning, but I've never seen a hoss as would fit the name like him." The boy's heart had not so gone out to a horse since Baldy's time, and though the two ponies were very different in

appearance and disposition, in after years John found it hard to tell which he most cared for.

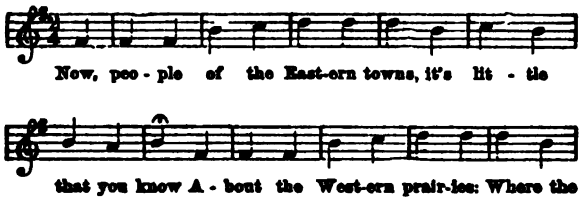
Before beginning the training he let up on the terrible strain, the constant struggle, to which "Lite" had been subjected and allowed him to recuperate; he took care of him himself, and later, when he grew stronger, allowed no one else to ride him. Gradually the horse learned to know his master and understood that that master would not ill-treat him; and so there grew up a sort of sympathy between them. "Pitch" he always did when John first mounted him, but he soon settled down to steady business, and a mighty capable beast he proved to be.

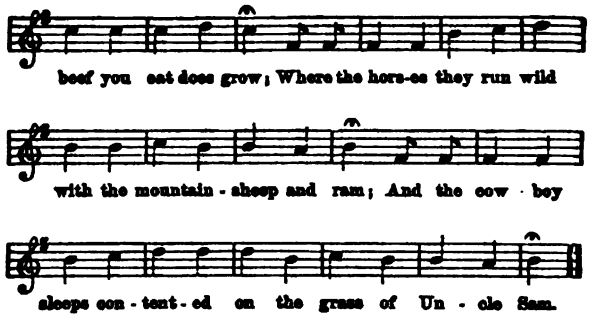
Though John found the wages of a broncho buster good, the work was very hard, it being the most violent sort of gymnastics all day long. When night came he was glad enough to sit down and rest; he would, in fact, not have been sorry to turn in right after supper, but the talk and stories the men told were too good to be lost. It was near round-up season and the riders were being gathered, preparatory to starting off on that great yearly summing-up expedition. There were men from all over the United States and Mexico, college-bred men and men of the soil. No man knew the other's history, nor would any one ask questions. There was hardly one but

had strange experiences, some of which they told. Then there were songs, many of which were familiar to all and therefore popular. Frank Bridges soon became a favorite with everyone; his good nature and jolly fellowship won him many friends. Moreover, he had a good voice and was constantly called upon to exhibit his ability.

It was on a restful evening, after supper was over and the last rays of the sun were sinking; the men were lounging about in the most comfortable positions they could find; the talk had died down to a monosyllable now and then. Matt, the broncho buster, broke the silence: "Frank, give us the 'Grass of Uncle Sam'; you're the only feller that can remember words and tune both."

And Frank, obliging as always, without any excuses or palavering, sang the following in a good strong baritone:




beef you eat does grow; Where the hors-es they run wild
with the mountain - sheep and ram; And the cow - boy
sleeps con - tent - ed on the grass of Un - cle Sam.

THE GRASS OF UNCLE SAM.

Now, people of the Eastern towns,
  It's little that you know
About the Western prairies:
  Where the beef you eat does grow;
Where the horses they run wild
  With the mountain-sheep and ram;
And the cow-boy sleeps contented
  On the grass of Uncle Sam.

We go out onto the round-up
  To brand the sucking calf.
The stranger gets the bucking horse
  (You bet then we all laugh).
He flings his arms towards the sky,
  His legs get in a jam;
He turns a flying somersault
  On the grass of Uncle Sam.

The angry bull takes after us
  With blood in both his eyes;
We run, but when his back is turned
  He gets a big surprise.

Our ropes jerk out his legs behind
  And he goes down *kerslam!*
We drag the fighting out of him
  On the grass of Uncle Sam.

The horse-thief comes along at night
  To steal our ponies true
We're always looking out for him,
  And sometimes get him, too.
We ask him if he's ready
  And when he says "I am,"
The bottoms of his feet they itch
  For the grass of Uncle Sam.

And when the round-up 's over
  To town we go for fun.
The dollars we have hoarded up
  Are blown in, every one.
Then broke, we hit the trail for camp
  But we don't care a ———
Wages are good when the grass is good,
  The grass of Uncle Sam.

Beneath Grass.

By the time the singer was half-way through most of the impromptu audience were singing the familiar air too. Their voices were none too sweet or soft, for the icy blasts of winter and the

dust-laden breezes of summer did not tend to improve them; but it was with a right good will that they applauded Frank when he finished. The song over, the talk began again, quietly, with long pauses, while this man puffed his pipe or that rolled a cigarette. The light had entirely gone out of the sky now, and only the dim glow of the shack lamp through the open door showed one man to the other.

"Well, kid, think you can tame the buckskin?" drawled Jerry lazily.

"Sure—after a fashion. 'Lite' 'll never be an easy thing; he's got too much life in him, but we have got to know each other pretty well now and we'll get along all right."

"You get that little horse sc's you can ride him and you'll have the best pony goin'." Matt spoke with conviction.

The talk grew more and more disjointed, and finally stopped altogether. Then one by one the men stalked without a word into the cabin, and in a few minutes all hands were drinking in the sleep as only thoroughly tired, healthy men can.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COW-PUNCHER IN EARNEST.

The round-up was now at hand—that great account of "stock taking," literally, the closing of the year's books as it were, on the cattle range. At its conclusion the ranchman would know whether the previous winter's storms and cold had allowed him any increase or not. The cattle roam at will over great tracts of country bounded only by watercourses and the wire fences along the railways; the herds of one ranchman mingle with those of another, and only during the round-up are they separated and the calves marked with their respective owners' brands.

The date of the round-up is fixed beforehand and all the details arranged, so that when the day arrives every man is ready to take the field. As several owners have cattle on the range, each sends his quota of cowboys to do the riding, and all work together under a general head or round-up boss.

The Sun River Ranch had perhaps the largest

number of cattle out, and its outfit consisted of twenty-five men, with two cook wagons and several other vehicles to carry beds and various necessaries.

The morning of May 25th, the day set for the rendezvous of the round-up, was as near perfect as one could wish. With the first streak of light in the east all hands were routed out, and after a hasty breakfast, everyone at once set about making the last preparations to take the field. Some helped the cooks load up their wagons and pack the utensils; some were busy piling the beds into their places, and the rest were occupied with their own riding outfits or looking after the large saddle band.

It was a gay crowd; you would have thought it was a gang of boys off for a swim instead of a party of men bound on a very serious undertaking, accompanied, as it was sure to be, with a good deal of danger and no end of hard work and privation.

John was in the thick of it, looking after the horses he had helped to break. Of these there were a goodly number, for from six to eight were required for each man. He noted with pride that "Lite's" bruises had entirely healed and that his bones were almost wholly hidden by the firm flesh and muscle he had gained under his new

master's watchful care. The boy was to be one of the gang that represented the Sun River Ranch, and he looked forward to the round-up as an opportunity to show what was in him.

At last the procession was ready to move, and amid a chorus of "so longs" to those left behind, the shouts of men, the whinny of horses, the rattle and bang of wagons and cooking utensils, the snapping of whips, and the beating of hoofs, it started.

Little time was wasted in making the journey to the camping place, for all were anxious to get to work. At this time, men gathered together from widely separated points, acquaintanceship was renewed and gossip exchanged. The following morning found them at the appointed camping ground in convenient proximity to a stream, and at about the centre of the territory which it was proposed to sweep clean of cattle. Already the triangle bar (△) and the M T outfits had arrived; their cook wagons were unpacked and their fires built. It was not long before the Sun River boys, called the Three X outfit, from their brand (XXX), were likewise settled. The settling in order was not a very elaborate proceeding; there were no carpets to be laid—"the grass of Uncle Sam" served that purpose admirably—the bric-à-brac consisting of

saddles, bridles, and some harness, which was slung carelessly on the ground; and the furniture, if the rolled-up blanket beds could be called such (and there was no other), were left in the wagons till wanted.

A hole a foot or so deep and a few feet in diameter was dug in the ground to hold the fire and at the same time prevent it from spreading to the surrounding prairie—a thing to be dreaded. The tail of the cook's wagon was let down, thus forming a sort of table and disclosing a cupboard arrangement. An awning was spread over the whole and it was ready for business.

As soon as these arrangements were completed the men broke up into little groups, renewing old friendships and exchanging the bits of news that one or the other had learned. John hung round the cook's wagon, making friends with that important individual. He was no poor hand with the frying-pan himself, and the appreciation of the cook's efforts soon won over this personage.

"Well, Billy," John was saying, "you'll be kept pretty busy this trip, I guess."

"Yes, it'll be no easy thing," he answered. "It's a big round-up, and it's so terrible dry for this time of year and so dusty that the boys'll be weary and lookin' for trouble—and it'll all come back on me."

"Oh, I guess not," said John consolingly, as he walked about, kicking the tufted buffalo grass and swishing his quirt about aimlessly. "I tell you what, Billy, it wouldn't take much to start a fire in this"—he slapped the grass with his lash. "With a wind like this we'd have a blaze in a minute that would be harder to stop than—— Look out!"

John rushed over to the shallow firepit, shouting warnings as he ran, and began stamping down the thin edge of fire that was eating its way into the bone-dry grass. While the two were talking, a gust of wind had blown a brand out of the pit and into the tinder-like hay. John kept stamping frantically, and in an instant Billy had joined him and was also vigorously engaged in crushing out the dreaded flames. They both shouted lustily, and soon a number of the punchers, seeing the thin smoke and realizing the danger, came over to help.

Fire is perhaps the thing of all others that the plainsman dreads; a prairie blaze once fairly started and sweeping over an expanse of territory is almost impossible to stop, and there is nothing to do but run before it; man and beast, tame and wild, flee from it. Only charred and blackened ashes lie behind the swiftly advancing thin line of flame.

All this came into the minds of the men as they tramped on the red tongues of flame that lapped ever further along and around. There was no time to plough round (even if such an aid as a plough could be had) and so check the fire by turning under what it fed upon. Soon it was seen that it would take more than the trampling of men's feet to put it out, and a line was started down the creek with buckets. Then blankets and gunny sacks were wet and beaten against the flames.

The smoke choked and blinded, and the heat was almost unbearable, but the men kept the blankets going until the spiteful red tongues drew back defeated, and died. It was a hard fight for a couple of hours, and when it was over those who took part were hardly recognizable—faces blackened and eyes reddened by smoke, hair, beards, and mustaches singed.

John, who had drawn his smoke-begrimed fingers over his cheeks and forehead, was a sight; Frank saw him thus and said he looked like a cross between a tiger and an ourang outang.

For a day or two after all the outfits came into camp the time was spent in organizing the round-up and planning the campaign. The ranchmen or foremen, as the case might be, were extremely busy during this time, but for once the punchers

EACH MAN TOOK HIS ROPE AND FLUNG IT OVER THE HORSE HE WANTED. (*Page* 281.)

were at liberty to do as they pleased. All sorts of cowboy sports were indulged in; horse-racing (where "Lite," like Baldy, generally came out ahead, under John's understanding jockeyship), rope-throwing, and feats of horsemanship. What to an Easterner would appear impossibilities were commonplace acts of good riding for a cow-puncher. Picking up a hat from the ground while riding at full speed was a feat of good but not at all extraordinary riding.

The men were full of life and energy—sky-larking was going on continually. It was no place for the seeker of peace and quietness; the air was filled with cowboy yells and shouts of laughter. The unwary one, afoot or on horse-back, was likely to hear a sudden swish and in a second find himself hugging mother earth and acting as if he was trying to pull a peg with his teeth, the result of some rope throwing in his rear.

As evening draws near the word is passed that "real work will begin to-morrow," and all hands quiet down, realizing that they will need all the strength that rest can give them. Soon after supper the men pull out their bed rolls, spread them, and, using their saddles as head rests, turn in.

The Sun River round-up is in camp. The

moon beams placidly down and shows in high relief the white-topped wagons and tents huddled together. Beds are scattered here and there upon the ground, and from each comes the sound of tired men's breathing. Half a dozen saddled and picketed horses crop the grass near by, and a small bunch of cattle, guarded by a single rider, who lolls sleepily in his saddle, lie a little further off, their heavy bodies appearing strange and shapeless in the half light. A coyote from a little distance barks and howls, but even its voice is drowsy. The only animated sound comes from a bell on a horse tinkling as he feeds.

At four o'clock a little red spark appears near the XXX outfit and the cook can be dimly discerned moving round his wagon. Soon the smoke begins to pour from his fire, and then the cooks of other outfits also show signs of life. Tin pans and kettles are heard to rattle, and breakfast is under way. At a quarter to five the cooks begin the *reveille* of the plains; dishpans in hand they move about among the sleeping men beating an awakening call neither musical nor poetic, but most effective. Between the strokes comes the long-drawn cry, "Grub p-i-l-e! Grub p-i-l-e!"

Apparently it is no easier to rouse up from the

rough couch, knobbed as it is with the inequalities of the surface of the ground beneath, than it is to rise from "flowery beds of ease."

"Cow-punching ain't what it's cracked up to be," said Jerry grumblingly to John as they lay near a XXX wagon. "I'm goin' to quit after this round-up and drive a horsecar."

"It is kinder tough," returned the younger. "I haven't got used to 'Lite's' prancin's yet and I'm stiff."

It's the privilege of every working man on land and sea to grumble at the early getting-up time, and the cow-puncher takes all possible advantage of this immemorial right. They obeyed the summons, nevertheless, and by the time the night-wrangler came up with the saddle band Jerry and John were on hand with the rest of the punchers, having rolled up and stowed their beds in the wagon. A rope corral was drawn about them which sufficed to keep them together, the cow-pony having learned the lesson thoroughly not to run against a rope, even if it is flimsily supported. Each man took his lariat and flung it over the horse he wanted to ride that day. As the noose tightened round the neck of each horse it stood stock still till its owner came up to it. Led a little apart, the fifty-pound saddle was flung over, and in spite of more or less struggling

the cinches were drawn tight and the heavy bridle buckled on.

The rush for the mess wagon which followed resembled a run on a bank, and for a few minutes the clatter of tin dishes and steel knives and forks drowned all other sounds. A tin cup of strong, black coffee, a slice or two of bacon, potatoes swimming in gravy, and a generous chunk of bread comprised the bill of fare.

With plates and cups filled, John and Jerry go off a little way to a wagon, and sitting cross-legged with backs against the wheels, proceed to put away with all possible dispatch the food allotted to them. In a few minutes breakfast is over, when each man brings his dishes and throws them on the pile which cook is already busily engaged in washing. Similar proceedings have been going on at all the different outfits at the same time, and soon all hands converge towards the round-up boss's camp.

John and Jerry joined the gathering crowd near the "captain's" wagon and waited for orders. After a few minutes Kline, captain of the round-up, appeared, a stocky man with a gray beard, slouch hat, and greasy, round-up clothes; chaps, flannel shirt, and big spurs. The crowd quieted down instantly.

"Barrett, take six men and go to the head of

Bar Creek and rake the brush like a fine-tooth comb," began Kline. Barrett swung into the saddle, and picking out six men rode off with them.

"Haggerty, take six men and clean up Crooked Creek; Moore, three men and go up Indian Gulch," and so the orders went. Each group started on the instant, and trotting off, disappeared in a cloud of dust. Soon all the punchers had gone; only the cooks, the horse-wranglers, and a few drivers were left.

Jerry and John had been sent up a small creek to drive in all the cattle they found in that section. The head of the creek reached (it was about fifteen miles off), Jerry, who was riding some distance from John, signalled to him to turn back and make a detour so as to get around the animals ahead. At the sight of the riders the wild cattle began to gather into bunches and stare; this tendency to come together made it much easier to drive them.

By the time they had driven two miles a considerable number had gathered, which increased as it moved onward as a snowball gathers bulk when it is pushed along.

When Jerry and John reached the main valley they were driving perhaps a couple of hundred head before them. Herds were pouring in from

every direction, and soon the whole valley was filled with a vast mass of variously tinted animals, their horns tossing like a sea of tall grass. Over all hung a great cloud of dust that obscured the sun and made it impossible to distinguish a rider the other side of the herd. "This is fierce," ejaculated John as he tried to peer through the brown-gray cloud at another rider.

"A cow-puncher can't live without dust," returned Jerry, whose face was covered with a gray mask, through which his eyes shone in strong contrast. "My teeth is worn down and my lungs coated with it, but I don't mind it no more. Look out for that cow there!"

An old cow, made angry and brave at once by an apparent menace to her calf, was charging down on John full tilt—tail up, head down, eyes rolling—vengeance in every motion; for a minute it looked as if he would be run down: the charging beast was going at such speed that she would be hard to avoid; but when she was within five feet of the boy's horse he gave a quick pull on the rein, a sharp jab with his spurs, and the clever little cow-pony wheeled sharply round and out of range, the old cow lumbering harmlessly by, her own weight and impetus preventing her from turning.

"You want to keep your eye out for those old

cows with calves," admonished Jerry, "they're looking for trouble."

All hands were now busy keeping the great herd together, single animals were constantly breaking out and had to be driven back; sometimes several would start at once, when there would be some pretty sharp riding for a while.

It was about midday, the sun was blazing down from above, the dust rose in clouds from below, lining mouths and nostrils of the riders. Since six o'clock they had been in the saddle constantly, and all felt, as Jerry expressed it, "Plumb empty and bone dry."

The herd presently quieted down somewhat and allowed the men to eat in relays, some watching while others fed. It was the briefest kind of a meal, but it sufficed, and in a half hour every man was ready, mounted on a fresh horse, for the real work of the day—"cutting out."

John and Jerry approached the tumultuous herd, a swirling restless sea of backs and horns. The din was tremendous; every cow lowed to her calf and every calf to its mother; the tread of thousands of hoofs even on the soft earth caused a heavy, rumbling sound that filled the air, and above all was the sharp rattle of one horn against another, of a thousand horns against each other. Into this seething mass of living wild creatures

armed with sharp horns, and the tread of whose hoofs was death, must go the cowboy and his intrepid pony. To drive out the cows and their accompanying calves, so that the brand of the mother might be put on the offspring, was the cow-puncher's duty.

Jerry and John were as usual near together, and Jerry as usual grumbling. He declared that this cow-punching was a dog's life and that he would surely quit it after this round-up. John, as was his custom of late, was discoursing on the merits of "Lite." "I'll show you what a good cutting-out horse he is to-day," the youngster was saying. "You just watch him." Jerry suddenly rode off to head off a steer that had broken out of the bunch and so stopped the boy's talk. When he came back John was about to dismount to aid a weak calf to rise. "Look out!" was all Jerry had time to shout, as an old cow with horns like spears came charging down on the stooping boy. It was not her calf, but she thought it was. John's horse had become startled and ran back so fast that he could not reach the saddle horn to mount. The infuriated cow was within twenty feet of him, the cattle hedged him in on every side so he could not run, and he reached round for his six-shooter as a last resort. He was about to pull the trigger when Jerry's rope came flying

through the air, settled round the animal's hind legs, and down she came in a heap just in time.

"You'll take my word next time when I tell you not to dismount in a bunch of cattle." John said nothing, but he realized that it was a pretty close shave.

Soon the cutting-out process began, to accomplish which the rider enters the main bunch, selects a cow with a calf bearing the brand of his outfit, and drives them out to a place apart, where other riders keep them separated from the main bunch and from the similar collections of other brands. To select his own brand from dozens of others requires a quick and sure eye on the part of the rider, and to follow that particular cow through all the turnings and twistings she is sure to take, requires great cleverness and perseverance on the part of the horse.

It was "Lite's" first experience as a cutting-out horse, but John had full confidence in his ability in this as in every other branch of cow-pony education. "You just watch him"—this to Jerry, who had expressed some doubts. John and Lightning rushed into the sea of cattle. Whether by the gentle pressure of the knees or remarkable knowledge Jerry knew not, but he saw the little horse single out an animal and start it out, following directly at its heels. It turned to the

left sharply; Lightning deftly threw his fore legs over its back and stood in its path; it turned to the right—horse and rider were there also. Through the herd they went full speed, twisting, turning, passing through lanes of cattle so narrow that John's legs rubbed their rough bodies on either side; but always they were close at the heels of the XXX cow, and finally they drove her out where Jerry was guarding several others of the same outfit.

"How's that?" said John breathlessly. It was hard work for horse and rider, particularly for the former.

"That's all right," Jerry answered, more enthusiastically than was his wont. "He's got the making of a good cow-horse in him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MIDNIGHT STAMPEDE.

On a wide flat the round-up outfit commenced working the big bunch. As the cutters-out dart here and there, whirling, dodging, and following, the small individual bunches slowly increase in size, while the main bunch correspondingly dwindles.

John and his Lightning work away with other riders until only the nucleus of the herd remains, and in five minutes this too has vanished. Each outfit pauses to rest a few minutes before the counting and branding begin; in the meantime Jerry is coaxing the fire in which the branding irons are heating.

"What'll you give for the buckskin now?" said John with pardonable pride, as he drove in the last animal bearing the XXX brand.

"He'll do; but I want to see you rope with him before I take back all I've said," answered Jerry. "He cuts out pretty well, but you get a calf on your string and the string under his tail and he'll

dizzy you," and Jerry began to poke the fire, chuckling the while.

"Oh, you're jokin'; I can ride him now without stirrups. I tell you he's a broke horse."

"The iron is hot now," broke in Jerry, as he rolled up his sleeves. "Let's see what your horse can do. Bring in your calves."

It was John's duty, with two other men, to rope the calves belonging to his ranch by the hind legs and yank them along the smooth grass to the branding fire, where Jerry applied the hot iron. He started Lightning on a run to rope the first calf, eager to prove his horse's ability.

One sleek little fellow stood on the edge of the XXX bunch, gazing in wonder at the horse and his rider. Doubtless the calf thought this a strange creature, able to separate into two parts and reunite without the slightest inconvenience. John went straight for it and broke off its cogitations suddenly by whirling his rope and throwing it under the little fellow. The calf started and jumped into the loop, and John quickly drew the rope tight, pulling its hind legs from under it and throwing the little animal heavily. Lightning was checked and the calf rolled over and began to struggle and bleat piteously. A green horse is nearly always frightened the first time he pulls on a rope: he does not

understand it, and Lightning was no exception to the rule. The rope touched his shifty hind legs and he kicked out with all his might; it rubbed harder as the calf struggled, and the horse began to whirl and plunge viciously in his efforts to get rid of the line that scraped his sensitive sides.

Fortunately the little creature got loose at this juncture and escaped. True to prediction, the rope got under "Lite's" tail and now the fun commenced in earnest. He bucked as he had never bucked before, and all but stood on his head. The other outfits stopped work for the moment to see the sport.

Lightning fairly foamed in his rage and fear; he bucked continuously, and every time he struck the ground he gave a hoarse squeal—shrill and wicked. John's strength was sorely tried; but after his boasting it would never do to be "piled up," so he set his teeth and vowed he would stick, no matter what happened. The fury of the effort made it a short one, but it seemed to John plenty long enough, for during the five minutes the saddle was like unto a hurricane deck in a raging sea. But through it all John came out triumphant. In the words of a bystander: "The little horse bellered and bucked and the kid never pulled leather" (did not hold on to the

horn of his saddle). Which was high praise from a cow-puncher to a cow-puncher.

"What'll you take for him?" called Jerry, as John dismounted to untangle the rope from "Lite's" heels.

"Money can't buy him," was the reply. John was bruised and stiff, but his pride was not broken and his faith in his horse was undiminished, though it must be confessed it had received a severe shock. "He'll bring that calf in or I'll kill him tryin'," he said sturdily, and he mounted "Lite" again and went back. He found the same calf, roped it, and "Lite," after a few futile plunges, dragged it up to the fire, where he stood with heaving, sweat-covered sides while the iron was applied. The hard lesson had been taught and learned for all time.

"He's got the making of a good cow-horse," admitted Jerry. "But, oh Lord! such a making!"

The way John worked the little horse that day would have seemed cruel to a novice, but he intended that he should never forget the experience of the morning, and he never did. The last calf was branded at dusk, and by the time this necessary torture was completed poor "Lite" was about done up.

The bunch was allowed its freedom for another

year and the cattle began at once to wander off, the old cows licking the disfigured sides of their offspring, the calves shaking and writhing with pain, failing utterly to understand why they should be tortured thus. The wound soon heals, however, and though the soreness disappears the scar remains always.

The day's work was over; the coolness of evening succeeded the heat of the day; the men stopped work and rode slowly into camp by starlight.

John and Jerry unsaddled their tired horses and turned them over to the care of the night herder.

"I'm dead tired, stiff, and sore to-night," said John, as he and his companion hustled for cups and plates in the dish box.

"It's a dog's life," returned Jerry, taking the cue. "If I'm ever caught on a round-up again I hope they'll tie me on a broncho and turn him loose." He grumbled on as he sipped his steaming coffee.

The two ate heartily and then strolled over to the main camp-fire, where perhaps fifty men lay sprawling upon the ground smoking, talking, and resting.

"Hullo, there's the three X kid!" some one shouted. "How's the legs, kid?" "How d'ye like astronomy?" said another.

And so the bantering went round, but John took it good-naturedly and even responded in kind. Soon a song was started, but the men were too tired to listen, and the singer stopped for lack of encouragement. About two hours after the day's work had ended all hands were rolled up in their beds and asleep, Jerry ending this first day on the round-up as he began it—grumbling.

"Cow-punching is a job for a Chinaman," said he, dropping off to sleep. It was the most scathing condemnation his imagination could frame.

This was but the first of a succession of days much alike, some easier, some harder, some full of incident and narrow escapes, others less exciting. The long dry spell had given way to a series of rainy days that were harder to bear than heat and dust. The wind-driven rain had a penetrating quality that nothing could withstand. The rider, after being in the rain all day, came into camp to find his bed saturated. The trying weather affected tempers, not only of the men but of their charges, the cattle, as well; they were nervous and restless, and this was especially true when electricity was in the air. As Jerry had said, it was "regular stampede weather."

John had seen small bunches of stock break and run, and had followed them over ticklish

country, but a big stampede had not yet been numbered among his experiences. He had often sat listening to some old veteran of the range tell of the horrors of a midnight stampede, when the great herds became an irresistible torrent of animal life driven on by unreasoning terror.

He knew that some time he would become an actor in such a scene and dreaded it in anticipation.

The sky was threatening when the riders were sent out one day to make the "big circle," as the gathering of cattle was called, a week or so after the organization of the round-up. By the time the bunch was collected it was raining heavily, and at intervals hailstones pelted man and beast viciously. The bunch was large that day, and as the storm continued the ground became too slippery and the cattle too crazy to attempt to work them. Nothing could be done but hold them together until things dried up a bit. The nervousness of the cattle was such that this required the activity of all hands.

John and Jerry were out in all this stress of weather, and, strange as it may seem, the older cowboy was almost happy: he had a really new and good chance for grumbling. "Even a coyote can hunt his hole and keep dry, but a cowpuncher has to sit up straight and take his medi-

cine," said Jerry, almost triumphant in his feeling of just resentment. "The worse the weather the more he has to brave it," he continued. "If I'm ever caught on a round-up——"

"That's the tenth time you've said that today," said John, laughing in spite of his own discomfort. Jerry made a queer picture. His long, yellow oilskin slicker reached to his heels and was just running with water; the felt hat that almost entirely obscured his woebegone features dripped water down his neck. He looked as forlorn as an equestrian statue decorated with cheap bunting and paper flowers and thoroughly water-soaked.

Everybody was out of humor and no opportunity was lost to register a "kick."

"Say, you three X men," said the foreman, "scatter out there; d'yer take this for a conversation party?"

"The horses is stupid and the cattle is worst. If I don't miss my guess there'll be trouble tonight. If ever I get caught in a——" Jerry's voice died away in a mere growl as he rode off to his post.

Left alone, John turned his eyes to the sea of backs swirling up and down and around like an eddy in a troubled sea. Even now the half-crazed animals threatened to break through

the frail line of men and scatter to the four winds.

And still the driving rain continued. A night in the saddle was inevitable—a dreary enough prospect. As evening drew near, flashes of lightning and peals of thunder added to the terror of the almost unmanageable cattle.

"Look at 'em steam," said John to himself, as he noted the vapor that rose from the acres of broad backs. "That's bad," said Jerry, as he came within earshot on his beat. "Steam brings down the lightning, men are high on horseback; steel saddles, metal spurs, six-shooters, and buckles make a man liable to catch it," and he disappeared in the mist, droning out as he went a verse of "The Grass of Uncle Sam" to quiet the cattle. It seemed futile to attempt to soothe the creatures by the sound of the human voice—they were in a tumult, and the slightest thing would set them off. For an instant there was a lull, and not only Jerry's but the voices of other riders could be distinctly heard singing and calling quietly to the cattle.

Suddenly there came a fearful flash directly overhead and streams of liquid fire seemed to flow in every direction. This was followed immediately by a tremendous clap of thunder. The effect was instantaneous. Each animal seemed

to be possessed of a demon and rushed headlong in whichever direction its head happened to be pointed. In an instant the orderly herd was changed to a panic-stricken rout, and the riders were swept irresistibly with it. The lightning flash was blinding, and the darkness which ensued was intense; through this men and beast rushed pell-mell without a pause, recklessly.

John, with the other riders, was in the very midst of the mad, surging creatures, their eyes rolling in a perfect frenzy of fear, their very breaths in his face, their horns rattling together close beside and in front of him. It was every man for himself, but even in the midst of this frightful chaos the cow-puncher's sole thought was for his stock. John looked for a bunch to follow—to follow to death if need be, but if possible stop it. That was the plan in John's mind, but it seemed utterly impossible of fulfilment. There was no bunch; each animal for once went off on its own hook and the confusion was fearful.

"I'll follow one then," said John to himself. Then to his horse: "Stand up now, old 'Lite.' If you fall you're a goner."

One big steer alongside ran strongly, and John let "Lite" know that it in particular was to be followed. He couldn't be seen in the darkness, but "Lite" could smell him and kept at his flank,

Away they went through mud and sage brush, over badger holes and boggy places. What lay in their path was a mystery, but "Lite" stuck to his leader like a leech. There was no time to reckon chances, if such a thing were possible.

As vapor forms into raindrops, the running cattle began to draw together into groups which enlarged momentarily. John was now following one of these groups, but in the pitchy darkness he could not tell how many it numbered. As pursued and pursuers rushed on, the smooth, rolling prairie was left behind, and rough, broken country was encountered. Up steep-sided gullies they struggled and down slippery hillsides they scrambled after the terror-stricken cattle. "Now's our chance," said John, speaking, as was his wont under strong excitement, to his horse and patting his neck in encouragement for the supreme effort that was to come. He spurred to the front and began to turn the leaders around. He struck them on the nose with his quirt, slapped them with his hat, and yelled at them.

Slowly one leader, then another, turned; others immediately behind followed, until the leader caught up with the tail of the bunch and round they went in a circle. "They're milling beautifully now, 'Lite,'" said John to his horse again.

"We'll keep 'em at it till they're too tired for funny business."

The circle gradually slowed to a trot, then a walk, then stopped altogether. The cattle were utterly exhausted, heads down, sides heaving and steaming.

John leaned over in his saddle and patted his little horse affectionately. His feeling was one of fondness mixed with gratitude for the pony whose wiry limbs, sure feet, good bottom and intelligence had carried him safely through a difficult and dangerous duty. He thought of what had passed, and marvelled that he was alive. To make such a journey amid the tossing horns and thundering feet of the cattle, over treacherous ground, in total darkness, seemed an impossible feat, and yet here were horse and rider covered with mud, saturated with water, almost unbearably weary, it is true, but without a scratch. John began to realize the danger, now it had passed, and appreciated the fact that to his game little horse was his safety due. "Lite" received the caressing pat on his nose and the words of praise his master gave him with commendable modesty.

The cattle were willing now to stand and rest; they all were trembling with fear and exhaustion and seemed in no condition to continue their

flight. "Lite," too, was pretty well done up, so John dismounted and unsaddled him; then, after putting one blanket over him, he wrapped himself in the other and lay down in the mud to sleep. It was cold and sopping wet, but John's inward satisfaction made outward discomfort trivial.

The hours were long before daylight—longer, the boy thought, than he ever knew them to be before. He was glad enough when the sun came and he was able to size up his capture. They numbered fifty head, and proud enough he was.

"Lite" was feeding near; at John's call he came up and, without his usual capers, allowed himself to be saddled. The two started the bunch toward camp—weary, hungry, sleepy, wet, and cold, but triumphant.

"My first stampede and back with fifty head," said John to his horse. "Not bad work, and I couldn't have done it but for you."

The storm had spent itself during the night and morning broke gloriously fine. John and Lightning kept the cattle going as fast as their strength would allow, which was all too slow for the boy, who was anxious to show his work to Jerry—his chum, his friend and counsellor, Jerry the grumbler, the good-hearted. He knew

that he would appreciate it, though he might joke.

As the bunch appeared on a little rise a short distance from camp, a horseman galloped out to meet them and to help drive them into camp. "Hullo, kid!" said the man, when he got within earshot. "You've done pretty well; biggest bunch that's come in yet."

"Oh, I've had a great old time," John began jubilantly, feeling as if he had not seen a human being for a month and must talk. "See that big spotted steer there, leadin'? Well, I follered that feller eight miles in the dark last night an' he set me a red-hot pace, you bet—but the buckskin here," patting "Lite's mud-spattered shoulder, "followed him close all the way."

"Well, you look it; got enough mud on yer to weigh down a team of iron horses."

"How many cattle back?" asked John.

"Only 'bout half the bunch."

"That's too bad," sympathized the boy.

"That's not the worst."

The man stopped, and John noticed for the first time a peculiar expression on his face.

"What's the matter?" said he.

"One of your men——" he hesitated.

"Well?"

"One of your men," he repeated, "went down last night."

"It wasn't Jerry?" cried John anxiously, having a premonition suddenly of something dreadful. "Say it wasn't Jerry!"

"Yes, it was Jerry." The man spoke the words slowly and solemnly. "Horse's leg went into a badger hole and the cattle trampled him."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN AWAKENING.

It was a terrible shock to the boy, and for a few moments he seemed dazed as if by a physical blow. He had come into camp weary of body but light and gay of heart, full of triumph, sure of a half-chaffing word of commendation from his friend and comrade. But that friend had met a horrible death. John's heart sank like lead, and for the time the light went out of the sky for him. There was no joy, no sunshine, no future—Jerry was dead!

"Where is he?" John asked of the man who brought him the sad news.

"In camp," was the answer.

John was in haste to go to his friend, yet he dreaded it with all his soul. He forgot his triumph, his pride in his horse, his weariness, in the one thought that filled his mind—"Jerry is dead!"

"So Jerry, great, strong, experienced Jerry, on his big bay went down, and I, neither

strong nor wise, am safe and well," John soliloquized.

In a minute or two they entered camp, and John's first question was "Where?"

The cook nodded toward a bed outspread in the shade of a wagon.

Mr. Baker, the ranchman, was there, and as John reached the place he pulled back the canvas covering. The boy never forgot the sight that met his view. Jerry it was, certainly, but almost unrecognizable.

John sat down by him, overcome by his first great grief. Death he had seen many times, horrible deaths some of them, but none had come so close as this. Cook, perceiving his plight, brought him a cup of steaming hot coffee, well knowing that it would put heart into him.

"Mr. Baker," said John at length, "he's got to be buried some place where the coyotes can't get at him."

"But it's sixty miles to the ranch," objected the ranchman.

"That's nothing. Let me have a team and a wagon and I'll get him there."

After some demur, which John finally overcame, Mr. Baker allowed him to take a big wagon and a four-horse team.

The body was laid in reverently, the horses harnessed and hitched up. Just as John was about to take up the reins Mr. Baker came forward. "I guess I'll go with you, Worth," he said. "Round-up's most finished and I can do more good at home."

He climbed into the seat of the big covered wagon as he spoke; and after tying Lightning alongside the wheel horse, John took up the lines. The punchers stood round, hats off, their weather-beaten faces grave and full of concern. All of them realized that this might have been *their* fate. Their rough hearts, accustomed as they were to all the chances of the dangerous life, were full of grief for the loss of their companion, "who was and is not."

"So long!" they said—a farewell to living and dead.

The whip cracked, the leaders jumped, and in a few minutes the white top of the wagon sank out of sight behind a rise. The sixty-mile funeral journey had begun.

For some time employer and employee sat silent side by side. John's hands were busy with the four fresh horses he was guiding, and his mind with the real sorrow that filled it. He had never known Mr. Baker well; that familiar relation, unknown in the East, between employer

and employed was prevented by John's absence on the range, but the boy was grateful for the kindness Mr. Baker had shown him.

"How long have you known Jerry, Worth?" the ranchman asked at length, touched by the boy's grief, and his interest aroused.

"Since I've worked for you only," was the answer. "Some people you never take to and some you know and like right off; Jerry was that kind. He always stood by me in quarrels, and many's the time he's stood a double watch 'cause he knew I was tired and he didn't want to wake me up. Yes, he stood by me through thick and thin."

"He was a good hand, too," interpolated Mr. Baker.

"He'd have divided his last dollar with me," continued John, more to himself than to his hearer. "I'd have done the same with him."

All this time they were travelling at full speed. The four horses yanked the heavy wagon along steadily over gullies and ridges, through valleys, and over hilltops.

A couple of hours passed in this way, during which John slowed the horses down over the rocky places and urged them forward where it was smooth.

"What are you going to do with your money,

Worth?" said Mr. Baker, hoping to dispel some of the sadness that hung over the boy. "You've not spent much this year, have you?"

"'Bout three hundred dollars, I guess. Jerry and I thought of starting in with a little bunch of cows on our own hook, but——" The glance that John gave over his shoulder into the wagon finished the sentence.

"Did you ever think of going to school?" asked the ranchman, intent on his effort to divert the boy's thoughts.

"No, I saw a dude feller one time that had been to school all his life"—John spoke contemptuously—"and I'd rather punch cows all my days than be like him."

"Why? He might have been a poor specimen. My son would have been a lawyer if he had lived, and I would a great deal rather have him one than a cow-puncher."

John shook his head, unconvinced. A vision came to him of streets walled in on each side by buildings so that every thoroughfare was a cañon and every room a prison. The joy of wild freedom, fraught though it was with danger and hard work, tingled in his veins.

"You know if you stay on the range," continued Mr. Baker, "it's only a question of time when you'll be stiffened and broken down, or

else, what may be better, you'll be caught as Jerry was. If you keep on punching cows all your life nothing will be left behind showing that you've been in the world but a pine plank set in the ground."

For a time John's thoughts were as busy as his hands. A new idea had been presented to him—his future. What would he do with it? He loved the wild, free life he was now leading, and up to this time he had never thought of working for something higher and more lasting. Mr. Baker had stirred a part of him that had long lain dormant—ambition. His plans heretofore had seldom carried him further than a few days or weeks, his sole care was to do his duty and keep his job; but now he had a new care—his future.

The horses jogged along steadily over the rough country, their driver getting every bit of speed out of them that would allow them to last the journey through. Most of the time Lightning went alongside the wheel horse contentedly. With particular perversity, however, as the team was passing through a narrow place, where there was barely enough room to pass, Lightning began a spirited altercation with his side partner. He shied off from him, pushed him, and bit at him till he in turn retaliated. For a time John had

his hands full, but "Lite," in his efforts to kick holes in the unoffending side of the wheel horse, got tangled in the harness, and so stopped the whole business. His master extricated him with difficulty, and "Lite," instead of getting the punishment he so richly deserved, was petted instead, whereupon he became very good indeed and rubbed his nose affectionately against John's sleeve, as much as to say: "I'm sorry. I'll never do it again."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Baker, after they had got started again, "that a fellow that could tame such a wicked brute as that horse was a few months ago could master anything, books or anything else."

"Oh, I've read some books," said John eagerly, "and I thought I knew something till that dude feller told all about the things he knew. But that chap couldn't ride a sway-backed cow," and John smiled, sad as he was, at the thought.

"You struck a poor sample," the ranchman responded. "He saw you could beat him physically, so he tried to get even with you mentally."

For a time they rode along in silence, the boy busy with his own thoughts, which Mr. Baker was wise enough not to interrupt.

At length Smith Creek, the halfway mark of their journey, was reached, and they stopped for

water, rest, and food. The horses were unharnessed and allowed to feed a while. Thirty miles had been covered in less than five hours—thirty miles of diversified country, hill and plain, rock and mud. The road was not worthy of the name, it was merely a wheel track more or less distinct.

John was restless, the short hour of relief allowed the faithful beasts seemed long to him, and he was more at ease when they were spinning along the trail again. He had been living on his nerve all the morning and the strain was beginning to tell.

Soon Mr. Baker began to talk again. He was interested in the young companion by his side, this boy so filled with determination, so energetic and forceful and yet so abounding in loyalty and affection, as his grief over Jerry's death and his fondness for his horse testified; this boy who read books and yet had such a whole-souled contempt of affected learning as evidenced by his ill-concealed disdain of the Eastern "dude." "You've never been East," began the ranchman, "or to school?"

"No. I was born in Bismarck, North Dakota," was the answer. "It must be queer," he added after a pause, and a smile lit up his tired face. "There's lots of women there, they say, and the men get their hair cut every month; the

people have to always dress for dinner, the paper novels say, and everybody goes to school."

Mr. Baker smiled at this description of the life and manners of the East, and kept plying the boy with questions, put kindly, until he had learned pretty much all there was to know about him. It was long since John had had so much interest shown him, and it warmed his heart; it was specially grateful at this time, when he felt that he had lost a tried and true friend. The ranchman advised him to work out the year and save his money, and at the end of that time doff his cowboy clothes and manners, array himself in a "boiled shirt," enter some good-sized town, and go to school and church.

John was rather dubious about this; "muscle work," as he called it, work requiring a quick eye, a strong will, and the ability to endure, he knew he could do, but about brain work and book learning he was not so confident. The idea of wearing a "boiled shirt" made him smile.

"Those stiff-bellied things the dudes wear," said he derisively. "Me wear one of those things!" and he laughed aloud at the thought.

Nevertheless the serious idea took deep root, and while he did not make any promises he had a half-formed resolve to follow the old ranchman's advice.

All this time the horses jogged along more and more wearily, and requiring more and more urging from the youngster on the driver's seat. The last ten miles seemed endless; it was all John could do to keep the team going, and even tireless Lightning running alongside moved unsteadily with fatigue.

They were glad enough when the ranch buildings appeared dimly in the fast-deepening gloom. The sixty-mile drive was ended at last. When the wagon entered the ranch yard John almost fell into the arms of one of the men who had come to find out the cause of this unusually late arrival. It was Mr. Baker who told what the wagon contained and the story of Jerry's death.

John dragged himself to a hastily improvised bed, and, dropping down on it, was asleep in a twinkling; the first rest for thirty-six long fatiguing hours.

Late the next day he was awakened to attend Jerry's funeral. It was a very simple ceremony, but the evident sincerity of the mourners' grief made it impressive. He was laid away on a grassy knoll where several other good men and true had been buried by their comrades. A rude rail fence enclosed the spot—the long resting place of men who had died in the performance of their duty.

For a time things went sadly at the ranch, for John (he did not rejoin the round-up) missed his cow-puncher friend, his good-natured grumbling, his ever-ready helping hand. But gradually the boy's faculty of making firm, loyal friends helped to fill the gap that Jerry's death had made, though no one could ever take his place.

Mr. Baker's talk about school and a future took deep root, and as the boy turned the idea over in his mind it developed into a resolve to try it anyway.

Life had a new meaning now for John, and he found it absorbingly interesting. The work he had to do was a means to an end, and the commonplace, every-day drudgery became simply a cog in the machinery, and therefore not only bearable but interesting.

The boy's success as a breaker of horses kept him much of the time at that work. Since he had broken Lightning all other horses seemed tame to him in comparison. It was part of his work not only to break the horses to the saddle but to care for them generally, brand the colts, and train them for cow-pony work, as well as to guard them by day and night. On these long day rides over the rolling prairie and bleak, fantastically shaped and colored "bad lands" he would take a piece of a book in his pocket, and

when an opportunity occurred read it. He read many books this way, tearing out and taking a few pages in his pocket each day. Mr. Baker was fond of reading, and understood the value of education; he had some books, and the less valuable ones he gave to his protégé; these and the few John had been able to pick up from outfits he met and during the infrequent visits to a town formed his text books.

As he thought and read and studied he became more and more convinced that cowboy life was not for him: to know more about the things he had read a few scraps about, to gain a place in the world, to learn something and achieve something was now his firm resolve.

The summer, fall, and early winter went by quickly for the boy. Each season had its own peculiar duties and dangers—the round-up and branding, the driving of the steers to the railroad for the Eastern market (a serious undertaking, involving as it might the loss of valuable cattle through injury and drowning when fording streams), the cutting of hay for the weaker cattle and horses, and occasional hunting trips for fresh meat. And so the year wore round.

On New Year's day John's time was up—the time which he had set to start out to seek his fortune. He had saved more than a year's earn-

ings, so the small capitalist saddled Lightning, bade his friends good-by, and set forth, not without some misgivings, on a new quest: to get knowledge, see the world, and, if it might be, grasp his share of its honors.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRANSFORMATION.

The love of adventure that possesses the soul of most boys was not a characteristic of John Worth. An adventurous life he had always led and thought nothing of it; it was too commonplace to be remarkable to him. This starting forth in search of knowledge, this seeking of the "dude" and his ways in his own haunts, was an entirely different matter; it was almost terrifying, and he was half inclined to turn back. To mix with men who wore white "boiled" shirts habitually, who dressed and went down to dinner, and who did all sorts of things strange to the frontier, seemed to John a trying ordeal, and he dreaded it.

He had no definite plan, for he could not quite realize what lay before him. A cowboy merely he would not be; he now felt that there was a larger place that he could fill, and he knew that this could be reached only through education.

A sound body and brain, enough money to last till spring, a good horse to carry him, and a strong resolve to get somewhere were his possessions.

For ten days he and Lightning wandered around from one settlement to another, from town to town; he was enjoying his freedom to the utmost, so much so in fact that none of the towns he passed through suited him. Finally he woke up to the fact that he was avoiding a decision, and he pulled himself up with a round turn.

"Here, John Worth," he said to himself "you're afraid to begin; any of those towns would have done."

He was in the open when he came to himself, riding along on a good horse, dressed in a complete outfit of cowboy finery, fringed chaps, good, broad-brimmed felt hat, heavy, well-fitting riding gloves, and silver spurs, the envy of every man he met.

For the second time a storm helped to decide his destiny, for as he rode along the sky became overcast and soon the snow began to fall heavily. "Come, 'Lite,' let's get out of this," he said to his only companion; and heading the pony toward the place where he knew ———— was located, he urged him forward. Just before dark he reached ————, and after finding a stable put

up at a neat little hotel near by. Even if he had wished to go on to some other place he could not now, for the storm developed into a regular blizzard, which prevented man or beast from venturing outside the town limits. John soon turned to the hotel keeper, a loquacious individual who believed in his town and could sound its praises as well as any real-estate boomer.

"Schools?" in answer to one of John's inquiries. "Schools? Why, we've got one of the best schools in Montana; higher'n a high school! Schools and churches—we're great on schools and churches."

He took his cue from John's questions; he could discourse just as eloquently about the shady part of the town, its slums, its dives, and dance halls; there was nothing in that town that should not be there and everything that was desirable—at least that was the impression this worthy strove to convey.

"Schools and churches," said John to himself. "That's what Mr. Baker said I must hitch up to."

For several days the blizzard continued, so long in fact that John grew restless and longed for something to do. He had about decided that he did not like this town and thought he would move on as soon as the weather permitted.

One day the landlord was declaiming earnestly on the merits of the town and its institutions.

"Now, there's the academy," said he. "Now that academy is——"

"What's an academy?" interrupted John.

"Oh, that's a place where they teach you things."

"What kind of things?" persisted John.

"Reading and arithmetic and geography and —here's Gray, he'll tell you all about it, he goes there. Henry, come here a minute," he shouted

A young man in overalls, well sprinkled with ashes, and carrying a fire shovel appeared.

The landlord introduced them and told Gray that John was looking for information about the academy. Then he went off, leaving them together.

"Well," said Gray, a slight, dark-haired, bright-eyed, thoughtful fellow, after some preliminary talk, "you begin with arithmetic; then comes algebra, then geometry and trigonometry in mathematics; the languages are Latin, Greek, French, and German."

The mere recital of these things was enough to scare John, who had scarcely heard the names before. When Gray went on to enlarge on the fine course of study the academy afforded, as a loyal student should, his hearer was appalled by

the amount of learning necessary even to enter a school, and feared the ranch after all was the place for him.

"Some of the fellows are good workers," Gray went on, "but some do nothing but talk to the girls."

"Girls!" thought John. "So girls go to school with the boys here." This boy, who had hardly seen a girl, was terrified at the idea of being brought into such close association with them—he was quite sure now the ranch was the place for him.

That night he made up his mind to go back to Mr. Baker and ask for his old job, but the next morning was no better than the preceding ones.

For lack of something better to do, after much persuasion on Gray's part, he went with him to the academy.

The things he saw there were as strange to him as they would be to an Esquimau.

An old-fashioned school of one hundred and fifty students seated at rows of desks, the boys on one side of the room, the girls on the other. The principal sat at one end, surrounded by blackboards. Gray found a seat for John at the back of the room, out of the range of curious eyes, and he sat there and watched and listened—wonderingly.

The classes went up and recited one by one or demonstrated mathematical problems on the blackboards. John heard with amazement youngsters answer questions which he could not comprehend at all, and yet he noticed that their faces were care-free and happy, as if they had never known what trouble was. The faces he knew, young and old, bore distinctly the traces of care and hardship. He was intensely interested and enjoyed the whole session keenly.

When noon came, Gray approached, as he thought, to return to the hotel with him, but to his surprise he was marched up to the principal's desk and introduced to Professor Marston. John was awe-stricken, but the principal knew boys thoroughly, and soon put him at his ease.

"Will you come with us?" asked Mr. Marston after a while.

"I wanted to, but I guess not now." Somehow John's resolve seemed rather foolish in the presence of this kindly faced man with the high forehead.

"Why? What is the trouble?"

"Oh, I changed my mind."

"What's your reason?" persisted the professor. "You don't look like a fellow who changes his mind with every wind."

His manner was so kindly, his interest so evi-

dent, that John let go his reserve and told of his ambitions and hopes and then of the futility, as he thought, of a fellow at his age beginning at the very lowest rung of the ladder when boys much younger than he were so far advanced. This applied not only to actual schooling but to all the little things wherein he saw he was different from these town-dwelling youngsters.

Mr. Marston was interested. He invited John to call and see him after school. "I think we shall be able to talk our way out of this difficulty," he said, as the boy bade him good-by.

At the appointed hour John appeared, eager to be convinced but altogether dubious. Professor Marston received him cordially, and, taking him into his private office, talked to him "like a Dutch uncle," as John assured Gray afterwards. He spoke to him out of his own wide experience, told him of men who had worked themselves up to a high place from small beginnings by determination and hard work. He showed John that he believed he could do the same, and finally brought back the confidence in himself which for a time had been banished.

"How did you come out?" called Gray as John burst into the hotel, his face beaming, his eyes alight—confidence in every gesture.

"Bully!" exclaimed he. "I'm going to start right in."

"That's the way to talk," said his friend, delighted at his good spirits.

"Professor Marston is going to help me, and I'm to get some one to night-herd me; between the two I'm going to round up all those things and put my brand on 'em. I mean," he hastened to explain, as he realized that Gray might not be up on all the cow-punchers' phrases, "I hope to put away in my mind some of the things that go to make up book-learning."

Whereupon Gray volunteered to act as his night-herder, as John called his tutor. The offer was gladly accepted, and the two went out to get the school books which Mr. Marston had recommended.

John's first day was, as he expected, an ordeal.

He was sensitive, and it tried his soul to stand up with the primary class—he almost a full-grown man. He heard the remarks spoken in an undertone that passed from lip to lip when he stepped forward with the youngsters, and he would have been glad to be able to get his hands on the whisperers and bang their heads together; but he only shut his firm jaws together a little tighter, clinched his hands, and drew his breath hard.

He did not even know the multiplication table, but under Gray's coaching he picked it up very rapidly. Mr. Marston made everything as easy for him as possible, and under the considerate aid of these two he made great strides in his mental training. His application and capacity for work was tremendous, and the amount he got through quite astonished his teachers.

The jeers of his schoolmates, however, not always suppressed, drove him more and more to himself. Gray, Professor Marston, and "Lite" were his only companions. "Lite" was now living in clover; never in his short life had he imagined such ease, so much provender, and so little work; he was therefore fat and exceedingly lively, so that when John was astride of him his master was able to show his schoolmates his absolute superiority in one thing at least.

As he advanced in his studies and demon-

strated his ability as a horseman and a boxer (he soon had an opportunity to show that he knew how to "put up his hands") the respect of his schoolmates increased—at least that of the boys did—but it was only the kindly glances from one girl's big soft eyes that saved the whole of girl-kind from complete repudiation on his part.

John's first visit to a church was an event that he did not soon forget. It was at Professor Marston's invitation. He came early, and as he told Gray afterward: "The millionaire took me clear up front. My clothes were stiff and my shoes squeaked, and I know everyone in the place was looking my way." The music was strange to him; the only thing familiar was "Old Hundred," and even that "had frills on it," he asserted. The form of service was new and the good clothes of both men and women oppressed him. The sermon, however, he could and did appreciate. A sermon was the only part of a religious service he had ever listened to. From time to time hardy missionaries visited the cow-camps and sheep-ranches, and he had often been one of the congregation that, rough though they were, and little as they appreciated what they heard, listened respectfully to the good man's sermon. John had often on such occasions, after the preacher had finished and gone away,

mounted on the wagon tongue and repreached the sermon, using his own words but the same ideas. He was therefore able to appreciate and enjoy this sermon preached in what seemed to him a most elaborate house of worship. This was his first attendance at a "fancy church," and it was the last open one for a long time. In the evening he was wont to steal in, in time to hear the sermon, he excusing himself thus: "I can't do it all at once; I'll have to learn their ways first."

The dinner at Professor Marston's which followed his first church-going was a red-letter occasion of another kind. John's earnestness and sincerity always made friends for him, and he speedily won the heart of Mrs. Marston. She took great interest in the boy and gave him many hints as to the ways of civilized life, so tactfully that he could feel only gratitude.

He left her home full of content; he had discovered a new phase of life—to him a heretofore closed book—the "home beautiful."

John Worth was a good student, a hard, conscientious worker, and with the aid of his friend Gray and his instructor he made more and more rapid progress. As spring advanced, he began to hear talk about "vacation"—a word the meaning of which was strange to him.

When he found out what it was he wondered what new wrinkle would be "sprung" on him next. But it was a serious thing to him; he could not afford to stay in town and do nothing —he wanted to keep on with his work.

Professor Marston called him into his office just before school closed, and after learning of his difficulty suggested that he get a job during the summer and come back to school in the fall, when he would give him work that would pay his necessary expenses while he kept on with studies. John's heart was filled with gratitude, but his benefactor would not listen to his thanks, and bade him good-by and good luck.

The boy went away thinking he was indeed in luck. The only trouble was to secure a job for the summer. This problem was speedily solved by Gray, who proposed that they should try to join a party of tourists that were to visit Yellowstone Park, and act as guides and guards. To their great joy they were able to accomplish this, and soon after the commencement festivities they rode out with the tourist outfit. John always had pleasure in remembering one of the number, a fearless, undaunted rider who won his admiration then, and still more later, when he became Colonel Roosevelt of the "Rough Riders." John in his old cowboy dress and mounted on Light-

ning was happy enough; as for the horse, he fairly bubbled over with joy and gladness. He showed it in his usual unconventional fashion by trying to throw John "into the middle of next week," but his master understood him well and took all his pranks good-naturedly, sitting in the saddle as if it was an every-day occurrence and not worth bothering about.

The boy's leech-like riding attracted the attention of his employers at once and especially one —a young Easterner named Sherman, who was a college man.

The summer's experience was a very pleasant one; compared to the work and hardship that John had formerly endured this was child's play.

On the long summer evenings young Sherman would often join John while he was keeping his vigil over the saddle stock, and they would have long talks, John telling of his experiences with Indians, cattle, and horses, while Sherman in turn told of college life, its advantages and pleasures, and the hard work connected with it.

Shortly before the time set for the return of the party, Sherman, who had learned to respect and like John greatly, said: "Suppose you study hard next fall and spring and prepare for college. If you can bone up enough to pass the examinations I think I can get you a scholarship."

The proposition took John's breath away, but he was not the kind of a boy to be "stumped," and when they separated he assured Sherman that he'd do "some tall trying."

The party of tourists among whom John was soon broke up. Sherman went East after exacting a promise from John to "carry out that deal."

John returned to ———— and to the academy, his path now marked out clearly before him and a prize worth striving for at the end.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWELVE HUNDRED MILES AWHEEL TO COLLEGE.

The academy reopened with some new pupils and many old ones. John shook hands with his few friends, glad to get back, and, with firm determination to carry out the purpose that now possessed him, started to work.

Professor Marston kept his word about the winter job, and John was duly installed as janitor of the building, with opportunity to make extra pay by sawing wood and doing errands.

He was fully occupied, as may well be imagined, and poor Lightning, though sure of good care, missed the companionship that both he and his master delighted in. John foresaw that he would not be able to keep the horse, and he finally decided what to do with him. He would give him his freedom.

One day the boy took him out on the prairie some distance from the town.

"Lite, old boy," he began, rubbing his nose and patting him, "we've had good and bad times

together, and we've been good friends, but we've got to separate now."

He took off the saddle and bridle: "Take care of yourself, old boy."

The horse looked at him a moment inquiringly; then curvetted around a minute in high glee; but as he saw his much-loved master leaving him he turned and followed, refusing to be cast off. "Go back, Lite," John commanded, waving his hat to scare him. "Go back!" But the little horse refused to leave him, and followed him back to town, where he was taken in and petted again. John was touched to the heart by this loyalty and affection.

Next day a stableman took him out among the range horses and dismissed him. This time he stayed, and John never saw or heard of him afterward.

That was a wrench.

Lightning gone, John allowed himself no pleasures, but instead took every bit of work that came his way, whether it yielded money or knowledge.

He joined the Debating Society and made it a duty to do his best when called upon. Toward spring, as wood sawing became scarce, he took to delivering morning papers to the more distant parts of town; and in order to do this more

quickly he hired an old bicycle, learned to ride it, and made his rounds just after daybreak on that. So he was able to get back to the school house and study a while before opening up.

"I don't see how you do it all, Worth," said Professor Marston.

"Well, I couldn't, I guess, if I didn't have a big stake to work for. If I keep my present school work up and study this summer I'll get into college this fall," and John told him of the offer Sherman had made him.

"I hope your friend won't forget," the Professor suggested, fearing that his pupil was building high hopes on an insecure foundation.

"He won't forget; he's not that kind."

"I hope not; but how are you going to get there? It's a long way."

John looked up quickly: he had not thought of that before. It was a serious question.

"I don't know; but I'll get there somehow." He spoke confidently but he was much perplexed, for he was without money, his clothes were threadbare, and it was a necessity to study all summer, with no chance to earn money. It was certainly a question that could not be answered offhand. He studied over this matter for days and no solution presented itself. Borrow he might, but this he would not do without giving

security, and of security he had none. He left it for a while, hoping to be able to think of a way out of the difficulty later.

Before he realized it Commencement had arrived, and with it the open meeting of the Debating Society at the Opera House. To his astonishment he found that he was appointed one of the two orators of the occasion. In vain he protested that he was busy, that he was unfitted; he had to accept. "Orator—Opera House—Me!" he fairly gasped with astonishment. He was rather worried about it, but Gray, whom he consulted that night, reassured him.

"Don't worry, anyhow," he advised. "Take a subject you're interested in, write out what you think about it, boil it down so you can repeat it in twenty minutes, then memorize it."

John also consulted Beeman, the other orator, who said he was going to speak about the Chinese Question.

"Against them," he said, in answer to the other's sharply put query. "That's the only way to please a crowd—take the popular side."

"Well, I'm going to take the side I want, and I'll tell 'em what I think about it, too," said John vehemently, his spirit thoroughly roused.

"Go ahead," said Beeman, visions floating before him of an opportunity to hurl his thunders

at a definite champion (and an inexperienced one) of an unpopular cause.

John set to work on his speech with his usual eagerness and energy. His heart was in it, and the prospect of a contest of wit or muscle always stirred him. He wrote, rewrote, cut down, filled in and polished until Gray, his friend and critic, pronounced it "good stuff."

In the meantime, he not only kept at work at his studies, his duties as janitor and paper boy, but he was at work at something else that he thought might prove most important.

At a half-mile race track, a little distance out, a very early rising citizen, if he happened to be in that vicinity at daybreak, would have wondered greatly to see a half-clad figure on an old bicycle go flying round and round the track. If, overcome by curiosity, he had waited a while, he would have seen the same figure, neatly clothed, appear from under the grand stand carrying a bundle of papers under his arm. Then if he watched he would see him mount an old bicycle and ride off. But this performance took place so very early that no one witnessed it.

At last the day of the Debating Society's open meeting came—the day on which John was to make his first public appearance. His speech

was complete, memorized, and ready for delivery. He spouted it for the last time to Gray, who put the stamp of his approval on it and advised him to forget it all till the time came to speak.

The Opera House was crowded when John and Gray reached it, for the town's people took great interest in its institutions, and of these the academy was one of the most important.

John looked out from the wings on the sea of upturned faces, appalled.

Beeman came first. He went out before the audience, cool, self-possessed, graceful, and delivered his oration smoothly, forcibly, and well. He chose the popular side, and the audience rewarded him with generous applause.

Then John heard the chairman announce, "Oration by John Worth."

He walked out from the dimness of the flies into the full glare of the brightly lighted stage, bewildered, and, without any preliminaries, began:

"In the history of every country, however just, however good or great, there are certain pages besmirched by the record of black deeds of wrong."

So his carefully written, carefully memorized speech began. As he stood before his audience he saw nothing but the pages of his manuscript:

he felt that he must keep his mind on them or he would be lost. He followed down the first page, mentally turned it over, and began the second. Beeman had touched a point on the second page, and treated it in a ridiculous way, he thought. His concentration was broken, and he began to fear for the first time that his memory would fail. A dozen lines down the second page he faltered, stopped, and stood riveted, miserable. The few moments' pause seemed endless. He tried to think of the next line, next page, anything; in vain, it was all a blank. The pile of manuscript, a minute ago so clearly before his mind's eye, had vanished, and he stood staring at the crowd before him. Some one behind tried to prompt him; it brought him to life. Beeman's fallacies had incensed him; he'd tell them so, and in no uncertain way. With a whole-arm gesture he mentally cast away his carefully prepared speech.

"It's wrong! All wrong!" he said intensely, and with conviction in his tones. His own voice electrified him. His first few sentences were mere bursts of indignation, his tongue went on of its own volition, it could scarcely give utterance to his stirred feelings. As he went on, his emotions grew more quiet but none the less earnest. Constant yodelling to cattle for years had given

him a voice which carried to the farthest corner of the building. He had carefully studied his subject, and now that he had regained his nerve he spoke his mind with enthusiasm and vigor. His arguments were well chosen and his language terse and to the point. Stimulated by excitement, new ideas came, and he uttered them with a confidence that afterward amazed even himself. Parts of his own prepared oration came back to him and he spoke it as if it was impromptu, with force and freedom.

The time had come to stop, and without a pause he launched out on his original peroration with the ease, confidence, and fire of a veteran orator. The closing sentence rang out clear and strong: "Men and women of America, let us wipe out the blot from this page of our country's history and make her in truth the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave."

His speech over, John stumbled, rather than walked, off the stage to the street. The reaction was great. He did not hear the applause, the cheering; he did not know that he had aroused the enthusiasm of people naturally prejudiced against his side of the question.

John went straight to his room and to bed, but not to sleep—his nervous tension would not allow that. The thing uppermost in his mind, the

thing that worried him, was that he had forgotten his speech—the speech he had so carefully prepared and learned by heart.

The papers had to be delivered in the morning, however, and a certain self-imposed engagement at the racetrack kept, so he was up betimes.

After these two duties were finished, he rode down the street to discover if possible the depths of ignominy to which he had been brought by forgetting his speech. The idea that he had disgraced himself still clung to him. Two fellows appeared right away, and before John could voice his greeting they called out: "Say, Worth, you just ate Beeman up last night. Are you sure you wrote it yourself?"

"He doesn't know that I forgot it," thought John, who hesitated a minute before he answered aloud: "Of course, it was all my own."

"Well, it was a rattling good speech, anyhow."

John thanked him, and then the talk drifted to the games to be held next day, and to the bicycle race especially, where the winner would receive a brand new up-to-date bicycle as a prize.

"That's going to be a hot old race," said Searles, one of the two students. "Every pedal kicker in town is after that new wheel."

"Yes, that's a prize worth riding for," and

John had a look in his eyes that Searles did not understand till later.

Several times that day persons of various degrees of importance—among them Mr. Haynes, the financial and political corner-stone of the community—stopped John, called him by name, and chatted pleasantly with him. Mr. Haynes said that he was a credit to the school and the town. So John's self-respect began to come back. His good fortune was dawning, now that he was making preparations to leave it all.

Field day came clear and beautiful, and the crowd came en masse to see the sports. A series of well-advertised events were to be run, the climax of which was the one-mile bicycle race. The prize wheel had stood labelled in the donor's window for a week, and every wheelman and boy in the neighborhood had gazed at and coveted it.

The early events were well contested, and worked the spectators up to a fever heat of interest. By the time the bicycle race was announced the crowd was wildly enthusiastic. Discussions as to the probable winner were rife.

"There's none of them that'll beat Tucker," said one. "He'll have a walk-over."

"He won't walk over Bolton," declared another.

And so it went, till the contestants appeared

on the track. Tucker and Bolton were the favorites.

As the men lined up at the stake some one remarked: "Why, there's Worth, with the old bike, too. He's the fellow that made the speech. I thought he had more sense than to go out with that old rattle-trap."

"They're off!" The shout went up as the starter's pistol cracked.

Tucker jumped to the front, and everybody cheered him; but Bolton was near, and as the riders passed the stand for the first time it was seen that he was close behind. Following Bolton's rear wheel closely was a strange rider on an old wheel, whom the crowd did not recognize at first.

"By George! It's Worth," said a student, surprised. The men swept by, closely bunched, their wheels rattling, their legs going like pistons, and the bodies of some swaying as they exerted themselves to the utmost to keep up.

"Bolton's going past. He's leading!" And the speaker jumped up and down in his excitement. But John clung to the leader's rear wheel and went with him. Faster and faster they raced, past Tucker, opening a big gap between the bunch. Bolton was riding for glory, but John was riding for something besides glory:

his success meant position, standing, a great opportunity, a future.

A hundred feet from the finishing tape he bent his head and made a tremendous effort. Early morning training stood him in good stead now, for he began to gain on Bolton, and inch by inch to pass him. The old machine groaned alarmingly, but it stood up to its work in spite of its protests. Twenty feet from the finish John seemed to leap forward, and crossed the tape just ahead of the laboring Bolton.

The crowd was rather disappointed to see its favorites beaten, but applauded the winner generously as he went up to the judge's stand to receive his shining prize.

Gray was the first man to wring his hand; his was an honest, unfeigned, glad congratulation.

"Say, Gray," said John, "you ride her home. I want a farewell ride on this old wheel. I pull out to-morrow."

"What!" ejaculated Gray in astonishment.

"Yes, that's what I wanted that wheel for. I straddle it to-morrow and go East. I haven't said anything about the plan, for I wasn't sure the wheel would be mine."

"Did you expect to win?" Gray asked.

"I've trained a month. That's what gave me the wind to finish so strong. You see my plans

need transportation East. I had to win—I'm going to ride that wheel to college."

That evening John bade the Marstons good-by. They tried to dissuade him from going; they pictured the career that was open to him in the town where he had made friends and had gained a reputation, but his mind was made up, and though he was touched by their kindness, go he must.

"I don't like to have you leave," said the Professor. "You'll be thrown into circumstances unlike any you have ever met before. But I know that you can adapt yourself to new conditions, and for that reason it may be best for you while your mind is growing. You will never forget the West, but I feel sure you will not leave the East, once you are settled there. Good-by, my boy, and God bless you."

John never forgot the kind parting words nor Professor Marston's always considerate treatment.

The two friends, Worth and Gray, talked long and earnestly that night and it was late when they retired, but at daybreak they were stirring. John ate a deliberate breakfast, strapped a few necessaries to his wheel, bade his friend a sincere farewell, and rode off.

He pedalled on in the crisp morning air till he

reached a high point, where he dismounted and took a long look at the town where he had struggled so hard, but which was the scene of his triumph as well as his trials. His satisfaction was mixed with regret, for he left behind good, true friends and a known esteem, for—he knew not what. The town lay in the hazy valley below, morning smoke-wreaths now curling from many chimneys, the gray shingle roofs embedded in dark-green foliage; it was a scene of contentment and rest. He contrasted this with other scenes, active, restless, hazardous ones; the cattle range, the sheep camp, and the mine. The thought of his home was not so clear as the later scenes, though he had visited it during his stay at school. He had found Ben an almost grown-up, vigorous, business-like ranchman, glad to see his brother, but interested in his own affairs; not the same old boyish Ben of old.

It was with real regret that he turned and left the town that had in a way been a cradle and a home to him.

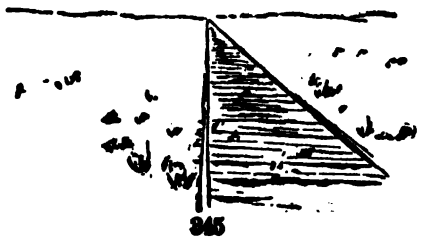
He mounted his wheel and sped down the slope —Eastward.

Day after day the traveller pushed on, following the windings of the roads now where formerly he would have ridden his horse as the crow flies.

Seventy miles a day. Eighty miles a day. Population increased; roads were better, ninety miles a day. His training for racing stood him in good stead. One hundred miles a day; his face always turned Eastward.

Rains came; the roads became rivers of mud. He was driven to the drier railroad track and jolted along over the ties. Sixty miles a day. The end not yet in sight, money exhausted, prospects not very cheerful; but with resolution undaunted he pushed along. A brickyard afforded temporary work. Five dollars earned, he "hit the trail" again.

Midday was fiercely hot; he took advantage of the cool mornings, and by twilight pedalled continuously. Wide swamps intervened. Insects, stingingly vicious, beset him. The sand along the river banks was heart-breaking to a wheelman and the mountains formed almost unsurmountable barriers. People he met misdirected or were ignorant, and he often went far out of his way.



But the goal was sighted at last. The day he reached Sherman's town he made one hundred and twenty miles and rode up the main street a sorry specimen—tired, dirty, tanned leather color by sun, wind, and rain.

His plans were fully made. The wheel was pawned at once, and two hours later John Worth emerged from a little hotel, bathed, shaved, and neatly clothed.

The address of his friend written for him was made nearly illegible by friction, sweat, and dirt. But by the aid of a friendly policeman he was able to find Sherman's house. He rang the bell, was admitted promptly by a neat maid, and ushered into a sumptuously furnished parlor, the like of which he had never seen before. The chair that he at last dared to use was soft and luxurious, and the journey had wearied him so that he was just about dropping off to sleep when Sherman entered.

"How do you do, sir?" Sherman's greeting was rather formal. "What can I do for you?"

At the sound of his voice John started to his feet with a jump.

"Don't you know me, Sherman?" he said.

"You—you can't be John Worth? Why, bless my heart, is it really you?" cried Sherman.

In an instant the one idea that had sustained

him through the trying hours and apparently endless miles of his journey came to John's mind.

"Yes," he said, the light of triumph in his eyes. "I'm John Worth. And I've come to college."

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